This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

went on,—" 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,' said the Apostle Paul; and it is so to this day. How many, even in our own highly favoured country, are there who daily pass through much tribulation, suffer much persecution, for Christ's sake! A thousand slights wound their gentle spirits, a thousand taunting words sink deep into their bleeding hearts. The arrows of sarcasm are unsparingly showered on them: suffering far keener than any which could be inflicted on the body is allotted to them; their best and holiest actions are mercilessly exposed to ridicule and contempt, and, perhaps, the motives which actuated them called in question. And," he murmured in a soft, sad voice, " often—too often—a man's foes are those of his own household—those for whom he would cheerfully lay down his life."

He paused, and remained with his eyes fixed upon some distant object, apparently quite unconscious of Herbert's presence. The latter felt his sympathies strongly drawn towards him, and, lightly touching his arm, he said feelingly, " You, too, have suffered."

Mr. Harland started. " Pardon my abstraction," he answered, returning Herbert's look of respectful tenderness with one of equal friendliness. " Yes, my friend, from you I will not disguise the fact: I *have* suffered deeply—intensely."

" I was sure of it," exclaimed Herbert. " I knew that——"

" But I was not thinking of myself when I spoke as I did," added the good man, quickly, a beautiful smile lighting up his countenance; " it would be strange, indeed, if I were to dwell on my griefs,—I, who have such unspeakable glories in prospect,—glories which will be mine almost immediately; for, while your race is only just begun, mine is nearly over. A few short months at most, and I shall have passed through the swellings of Jordan, and entered the pilgrim's rest. You look surprised and grieved, my dear sir; but to me this knowledge affords nothing but unmingled pleasure. My only wish in the matter is, that if it be God's will, I may be permitted to work for Him to the very end. I can do little now in the way of preaching: but even in this foreign land opportunities are sometimes granted me for speaking a word in season. And where I am not admitted, these "—taking a bundle of tracts and small books from his pocket, written in the French, German, and Italian languages—" find an entrance. And who knows what may be accomplished by such silent, yet withal eloquent messengers? "

" But is there no hope of your recovery? " inquired Herbert, with a face of grave concern. " May you not be mistaken in supposing——"

" I know what you would say," he replied, " and thank you most sincerely for taking such a kind interest in my welfare; but I dare not deceive you; this will, in all human probability, be our last interview on earth; for to-morrow I must hasten farther south, and you and your friends are, you say, on the point of returning to England."

He was about to say more, when a sudden shout of boisterous laughter startled them both, and warned them that they would soon be disturbed; and glad, perhaps, to end a conversation which was, he saw, becoming very painful to Herbert, Mr. Harland fervently pressed his hand, and murmured gently, but with deep solemnity,—" And now, my brother, I bid you God-speed! Run with patience the race set before you—*looking unto Jesus*. And may He bless, preserve, and keep you, now and for ever. Amen."

Thus they parted; and Herbert, with a sorrowful heart, went to join his companions who were in search of him, while Mr. Harland pursued his way in an opposite direction.

The two never met again; but Herbert had long cause to remember with gratitude their one interview.

Mr. Harland's words were still fresh in his memory, when he at length arrived at Mertonsville, where, as we have already seen, he received a loving welcome from his parents, which could not, however, prevent his feeling somewhat agitated when he reflected upon what might be the probable consequence of his announcing the change which had taken place in him during his absence from them.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRIST OR THE WORLD.

"As genial as sunshine,
Like warmth to impart,
Is a kind-spoken word
From a kind-hearted heart." *Anon.*

THE next morning rose brightly upon the inmates of Mertonsville Park. Herbert Seymour was early astir; and as he looked from his window upon the variegated landscape, and beheld the glorious sunlight shining upon the sparkling river, and heard the soft, low sigh of the fresh morning breeze amongst the luxuriant foliage of the trees, he fancied his home had never yet appeared half so lovely; for now he could view each blooming flower which shed its fragrance around, point to the glittering sunshine making the dewdrops twinkle like so many diamonds, gaze upon the shadowy mountains, and say, "I *see my Father's* hand in all,—each object proclaims His love!

The extreme loveliness of the morning tempted him to take a short ramble through the grounds before breakfast."

He had not proceeded far, when, coming in sight of the conservatories, it suddenly occurred to him to examine a favourite exotic plant, in the culture of which he had formerly taken an interest; but finding all the doors locked, he rapidly walked towards the gardener's cottage in order to procure the keys. Just as he approached the pretty flower-covered porch, and was about to knock, he heard the gardener's voice as if engaged in reading aloud.

Not wishing to disturb him, he softly drew nearer, when through the open window the words fell with perfect clearness on his ear, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust."

A glad smile shone on Herbert's face as he drank in these beautiful words of holy writ: he almost felt as if a special messenger had been despatched from the bright realms of glory to cheer and refresh his soul just when he needed encouragement.

After the conclusion of the psalm there was a pause, and then the same voice was raised in prayer. Few and simple were the words uttered, for George Lisburn was a plain, untutored man, who by untiring industry and perseverance qualified himself for the situation he had now held for upwards of thirty years as a confidential and valued servant in Mr. Seymour's family. No studied language or thrilling eloquence was his; yet as he poured forth his fervent petitions with childlike confidence and faith, as if from the depths of a heart overflowing with love to God, Herbert could not refrain from softly exclaiming, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

When the prayer was ended, he tapped lightly at the door, which was immediately opened by Lisburn himself, who gazed at him with mingled surprise and pleasure; and on learning the purpose for which he had come, he at once accompanied him to the conservatories.

600061451N

Watson & Hazell, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
THE SON'S RETURN	1
CHAPTER II.	
DARKNESS AND LIGHT	4
CHAPTER III.	
HERBERT'S INTERVIEW WITH MR. HARLAND	8
CHAPTER IV.	
CHRIST OR THE WORLD	12
CHAPTER V.	
CONFESSING CHRIST	17
CHAPTER VI.	
THE OLD BARN	21
CHAPTER VII.	
CALLED TO BE SAINTS	24
CHAPTER VIII.	
IN PERILS IN THE SEA	29
CHAPTER IX.	
DANGER, DELIVERANCE, AND DEATH	33
CHAPTER X.	
IMPRESSIONS	38
CHAPTER XI.	
MR. SEYMOUR'S PROJECT	42
CHAPTER XII.	
PLEASURE AND PAIN	47
CHAPTER XIII.	
WISDOM AND FOLLY	52

PAGE

CHAPTER XIV.
THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN 57

CHAPTER XV.
FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT 62

CHAPTER XVI.
JAMES GORDON RECEIVES NOTICE TO QUIT 66

CHAPTER XVII.
HERBERT COTTAGE, AND ITS NEW TENANT 71

CHAPTER XVIII.
HERBERT DARES TO DISOBEY 76

CHAPTER XIX.
PRAYING AND WORKING 81

CHAPTER XX.
MR. SEYMOUR DRIVES MATTERS TO EXTREMITY 85

CHAPTER XXI.
DISINHERITED 89

CHAPTER XXII.
HERBERT PREPARES TO LEAVE HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.. .. 93

CHAPTER XXIII.
SIR GEORGE HASTINGS' INVITATION 98

CHAPTER XXIV.
HERBERT OBLIGED TO SEEK ANOTHER HOME 103

CHAPTER XXV.
WILLSON SOOTHING HER IRRITATED MISTRESS 107

CHAPTER XXVI.
THE BURNT LETTER 111

CHAPTER XXVII.
HERBERT'S JOURNEY, AND ITS RESULT 116

CHAPTER XXVIII.
RETURNED CONSCIOUSNESS, AND A RELAPSE 120

CHAPTER XXIX.
THE PRAYER OF FAITH 124

PAGE

CHAPTER XXX.

HOPE DEFERRED 128

CHAPTER XXXI.

GOD'S WAYS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT 131

CHAPTER XXXII.

RECOVERY 135

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR EDWARD'S STUMBLING-BLOCK 139

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION 143

CHAPTER XXXV.

THOUGHTS OF KINDNESS 147

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ARRIVAL 151

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO SISTERS 155

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE POWER OF MUSIC 159

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANOTHER DROP OF BITTERNESS TO HERBERT'S CUP 163

CHAPTER XL.

THE YOUNG BARONET'S DECISION 167

CHAPTER XLI.

HERBERT'S NEW HOME 171

CHAPTER XLII.

JAMES GORDON'S SECRET 175

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE ACCIDENT 180

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. SNAPSON TREMBLES FOR HIS HEIR 185

CHAPTER XLV.

CHARLES HASTINGS IN TROUBLE 190

PAGE

CHAPTER XLVI.

TABLE TALK 195

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE POSTSCRIPT 200

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CHARLES HASTINGS GOES TO ST. PETERSBURG 205

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CARPENTER'S SHED 211

CHAPTER L.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE 216

CHAPTER LI.

HOW HERBERT'S UNINVITED GUESTS WERE ENTERTAINED .. 221

CHAPTER LII.

AN EXPOSE 227

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MEDITATED STRIKE 233

CHAPTER LIV.

THE REJECTED PETITION 239

CHAPTER LV.

MR. SNAPSON COMPELLED TO GIVE IN 245

CHAPTER LVI.

NEW REGULATIONS ESTABLISHED 251

CHAPTER LVII.

ALBERT'S BIRTHDAY PARTY 256

CHAPTER LVIII.

SUMMARY MEASURES TO PREVENT INFECTION 261

CHAPTER LIX.

MYSTERY 265

CHAPTER LX.

VISITORS AT THE PARK 271

CHAPTER LXI.

WILLSON CARRIES HER POINT 276

CHAPTER LXII. PAGE
MRS. SEYMOUR DECLINES TO RECEIVE REGINALD'S FRIENDS .. 282

CHAPTER LXIII.
THE LETTER BAG 288

CHAPTER LXIV.
THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM 293

CHAPTER LXV.
REGINALD'S TREACHERY IS DISCOVERED 299

CHAPTER LXVI.
GOOD AND EVIL TIDINGS 304

CHAPTER LXVII.
ALONE WITH THE DEAD 310

CHAPTER LXVIII.
A WONDERFUL CHANGE 316

CHAPTER LXIX.
THE LONDON PHYSICIAN 321

CHAPTER LXX.
CONQUERED AT LAST 327

CHAPTER LXXI.
THE OLD GALLERY, AND ITS HISTORY 333

CHAPTER LXXII.
ANXIETIES 339

CHAPTER LXXIII.
VISIONS OF THE PAST 345

CHAPTER LXXIV.
THE MISSING LETTERS 352

CHAPTER LXXV.
SOPHISM 358

CHAPTER LXXVI.
MRS. MORBY MEETS WITH A CHECK 362

CHAPTER LXXVII.
MISTAKEN IDENTITY 368

PAGE

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HERBERT MAKES A DOUBLE DISCOVERY 375

CHAPTER LXXIX.

PENRUTHVEN MOUNT 382

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED 388

CHAPTER LXXXI.

RELATIVE VALUE OF £20,000 393

CHAPTER LXXXII.

FALSE PRETENCES 398

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE FETE CHAMPETRE 403

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH 409

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE TURN OF TIDE 417

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE LOSS OF THE BURDWAN 425

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

A RENEWING OF THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS 433

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

REUNION 442

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

MRS. SEYMOUR'S WISHES ANTICIPATED 449

CHAPTER XC.

CHRISTMAS EVE 457

CHAPTER XCI.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGE, AND DEATHS 463

MERTONSVILLE PARK.

CHAPTER I.

THE SON'S RETURN.

"This castle hath a pleasant seat."—*Macbeth.*

"The time hangs dreary on us,
And we weary by our lane;
And I doot, I doot, we'll no can rest
Till he come back again."

In one of the spacious and luxuriously furnished drawing-rooms of Mertonsville Park were seated, on a lovely evening in August, a lady and gentleman, whose bearing and conversation proclaimed them to be the owners of the mansion.

A glance through the apartment sufficed to indicate wealth, united with refinement of taste and elegance of design. Exquisite gems of art from various countries, costly paintings and richly carved furniture, polished marbles and antique porcelain, were scattered profusely around. From the open windows a delightful panorama presented itself: a wide expanse of picturesque scenery, replete with nature's loveliest adornments, and lighted up by the glowing rays of the setting sun. In the distance a range of mountains lifted their shadowy summits to the sky, while the fitful windings of the river added grace and beauty to the whole. The grounds belonging to the estate of Mertonsville were extensive, and beautifully laid out, containing shady walks lined with fine old trees, and soft velvety seats, where one could sit for hours gazing at the ever-changing landscape, and listening to the soothing sound of some rushing cascade in the immediate neighbourhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Seymour, the occupants of the drawing-room, were in a state of unusual excitement on this lovely summer's evening; for they were momentarily expecting the arrival of their only son from Dilton, the nearest railway-station; and as the time passed on, Mrs. Seymour grew so eager and restless, that the favourite little spaniel at her feet was unnoticed, and strove in vain to obtain one glance or caress.

Not long, however, had she to exercise her patience; for her quick ear soon detected the sound of approaching wheels on the smoothly gravelled avenue without, and in another moment a tall, slight, finely formed young man, with large, dark, earnest eyes, and a thoughtful.

intelligent countenance, sprang lightly from the carriage, and was welcomed to his home with kind embraces and exclamations of joy.

"How well you are looking!" cried the fond mother, as she gazed with maternal pride upon her son's animated countenance; "Is he not, my dear?"—turning to her husband, who stood watching them, with a pleased smile upon his lips.

"Yes," he replied; "so well, that I am inclined to think your fears were all groundless."

"Fears?" repeated the son, looking puzzled.

"Oh, I can already see that I was mistaken," said his mother, laughing; "but I fancied your letters lately were penned in a graver style than usual, and I confess I felt concerned about your health."

"I am sorry you should have suffered any uneasiness on that account, as I have been perfectly well ever since I left you."

"You can scarcely imagine, my dear Herbert, how delighted we are to have you home again! Even our pleasantest parties have seemed dull without you; but now that you have returned, all will be life and gaiety once more."

A close observer might have detected a shade of gravity steal over the young man's countenance while listening to his mother's words; but she saved him the necessity of making any reply by continuing hastily,—"We must not, however, keep you here; for the dinner is already served. Just hasten to your room, and refresh yourself after your journey, and then join us in the dining-room."

This he did, and the rest of the evening was spent in cheerful conversation. At a late hour they separated, and Herbert Seymour retired to his room; but he did not at once seek repose. Some weighty matter apparently occupied his mind; for his looks were grave, and his manner abstracted.

At last he drew from his pocket a book, and sat down to read. It was interesting to note the change in his countenance as he went on—the grave, anxious lines gave way to a more hopeful expression, and the deeply compressed lips relaxed into a quiet smile, which remained unclouded until, after commending himself to the protection of the Almighty, calmly and peacefully he laid down to rest.

And here let me pause to explain more clearly to my readers the character and position of those to whom they have been introduced.

Mr. Seymour's personal appearance was not striking, but he possessed a tall and commanding figure, which corresponded well with the tone of his mind, the firmness and vigour of his will, and his habitual energy and decision of character. His manner was in general pleasant and affable, though somewhat pompous; and he was, on the whole, courteous, polite, and easy-tempered, unless he met with any one who attempted to thwart him, in which case he could be sarcastic, bitter, and resentful.

As regards social position, he sprang from an illustrious family, inherited an ample fortune, together with the magnificent estate of Mertonsville, and had much influence amongst his fellow-men.

He represented the town of Dilton in Parliament, was the founder and patron of numerous institutions throughout the country, having for their object the enlightenment of the people, the advancement of art, science, and literature; was one of the most wealthy, respected, and influential members of the society in which he moved, being not unfrequently quoted as a competent authority upon many topics,

where others, far better informed, were made light of, or altogether passed over; was popular, and deservedly so, for his bountiful liberality to those who dwelt on his estate, and were dependent on him for their subsistence. In short, he was emphatically in heart and life a thorough and consistent man of the world. He subscribed to its precepts, and followed its practices without gainsaying; and, while moral and upright in his conduct, bearing an unblemished name, a kind heart, a generous hand, he was a perfect stranger to vital godliness, knowing nothing of the transforming power of religion in the soul; feeling no need of greater strength than his own to enable him to walk aright: and classing all those who took the Bible as their rule, and walked according to its teachings, as enthusiasts or narrow-minded people, deserving only of his contemptuous pity.

His house was constantly thronged with visitors, whose lives were one continued course of excitement and gaiety; for his large means gave him the power of supplying them with every kind of amusement, and his brilliant entertainments were pronounced unrivalled even by some of the most distinguished in the fashionable world.

Mrs. Seymour, who warmly seconded her husband in these things, had been in her youth remarkably handsome, and her countenance still bore the remains of considerable beauty. Her manner was graceful and exceedingly winning, and she was naturally gentle and amiable; but contact with the world had done much towards checking the spontaneous kindliness of her disposition, and she was in great danger of suffering herself to be closely enveloped in the icy robes of pride and selfishness.

On any important matter she was in the habit—quite unconsciously—of leaning upon others, instead of exerting herself, or making use of her own judgment. She rarely, if ever, differed from Mr. Seymour in opinion, admiring his determination of character, as it had never yet proved inconvenient to her by crossing her in any of her own particular desires or amusements.

Herbert, their only child, was from his earliest years brought up in the lap of luxury and indulgence. Not a wish of his young heart was ungratified; not a request he chose to make unheeded. He was a quick and peculiarly intelligent child, frank, open, and fearless; entered with boyish glee into every scene of festivity suited to his age, and at the conclusion of his studies was prepared to enjoy himself more uninterruptedly than he had yet been able. Already in anticipation did he mingle in the joyous scenes which awaited him—scenes which to him revealed nothing but brightness and sunshine; for hitherto no shadow had crossed his path, no sorrow had entered his heart, and he looked forward to the great uncertain future with no dread, but smilingly, hopefully. He was the life of Mertonsville, with his exuberant, mirth-loving spirit—his father's pride, his mother's joy! Just at this juncture he received an urgent invitation from a party of his young friends who wished him to join them in a delightful tour they proposed to make, first through England and Wales, and afterwards on the Continent; and, as Mr. and Mrs. Seymour heartily approved of their project, preparations were immediately commenced, and ere many weeks passed away they had set out on their travels, fully determined to make the most of the year which had been allotted to them, and see as much as possible before returning to their homes.

CHAPTER II.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT.

"Light hath arisen,—we walk in its brightness;
Joy hath descended,—its fulness has come;
Peace hath been spoken,—we hear it, we take it;
Angels are singing, and shall we be dumb?
Calm 'mid the tempest around us that rages;
'Mid the lone weariness, ever at rest;
Silent amid the rude uproar of voices;
Sometimes disquieted,—never oppressed.
Happy in Him who hath loved us and bought us,
Rich in the life which He gives to His own,
Filled with the peace passing all understanding,
Never less lonely than just when alone."

Hymns of Faith and Hope.

LATE one Saturday, not long after setting out on their journey, the gay party arrived at the quiet little village of P——, being driven thither by the desire of visiting a noted waterfall a few miles distant. They had previously arranged to devote the Sabbath to this object, but to their great disappointment were unable to do so, owing to a heavy and prolonged storm of wind and rain which kept them confined to their hotel.

Dark and louring clouds hung like a thick drapery above, and the deep-toned roll of thunder and oft-repeated flash of lightning mingled with the torrents of rain which poured incessantly.

The first part of the morning passed gloomily enough, for nearly all the young men were chafed and irritated at the delay, and in no way disposed to make the best of the position in which they were unavoidably placed.

Their luggage had been left at a neighbouring town, whither they expected to return the next day; so that they were unprovided with books or any other means of beguiling the hours of the Sabbath.

At last they summoned their landlord, and entreated him to furnish them with some amusement; but, shaking his head, he said he feared there was nothing that would interest them, "unless," as he was about to withdraw, "*cards* would be acceptable."

"The very thing!" eagerly cried the young men; "bring them at once."

The man returned in a few moments, and laid the cards on the table. They were instantly taken possession of, and soon the friends, absorbed in the exciting game, seemed oblivious to all around them, and no longer spent their time in passing animadversions on the weather. And, alas! they were also unmindful of the command which should have been ringing in their ears—"*Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.*"

Towards evening the atmosphere gradually cleared, and the rain ceased to pour with the same violence as in the former part of the day.

Tired of remaining indoors so long, they were all thinking of venturing out, when they received another visit from their landlord, who said, with a very perceptible degree of hesitation, "Excuse me for mentioning it, but there is a stranger going to preach in the church at seven—a Mr. Harland, who is travelling for the benefit of his health, and is, I have heard, a very superior preacher." Receiving no answer to this information, he added abruptly, "Perhaps you might wish to go and hear him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Reginald Grafton, one of the most boisterous among them, "cards in the morning and church in the evening; this is your creed, is it, my good friend?" And his loud mocking laugh sadly disconcerted the timid but well-meaning landlord, who had been reproaching himself for having encouraged those under his roof to break the Sabbath.

"Well, Grafton," said another, with a yawn, "after all, his proposition is a very sensible one. This confounded weather will prevent our seeing anything of the country until to-morrow; therefore I, for one, vote that we take his advice."

There was a little demur at first, as this unexpected suggestion was made, but on the whole it was received with satisfaction; and at the appointed time the pleasure-seeking group were quietly seated in the house of God.

The prayers were conducted by the clergyman belonging to the parish, and at their conclusion Mr. Harland took his place in the pulpit. He was about thirty years of age, pale and feeble looking, but with a countenance of singular sweetness—indicating firmness and resolution, united with gentleness of disposition and energy of purpose.

A swift, keen glance he threw around him; then in full, rich tones announced his text, and proceeded with his sermon.

The subject was "Joy unspeakable, and full of glory;" and as calmly, but with deep earnestness, he spoke of the joy which it is each believer's privilege to possess even on earth,—contrasting it with the false and fleeting pleasures of the world; the one so real and unfading, the other a mere shadow, which only remains for an instant, and then passes away for ever,—he succeeded in concentrating the devout attention of his hearers. The impressive fervour of his manner, coupled with the eloquence of his language, sent a strange thrill of emotion through Herbert Seymour's frame, and caused him to listen to each word with intense interest.

To him all was new. Of religion he had learned but little, and that little had been presented to his mind in so gloomy and unattractive a garb, that he considered everything relating to it in the light of an irksome duty, to be postponed as long as possible. *Now*, for the first time, he was told that it was not so much a duty to be performed, as a most delightful privilege to be enjoyed; and when Mr. Harland went on to describe the effect of this joy, and by his striking imagery and lovely examples explained what it had often done for its possessors amidst the deepest sorrows, the loneliest hours,—in times of poverty and suffering, and in the immediate presence of death itself,—he became sensible that to this he was an utter stranger. To doubt the speaker's sincerity was impossible; one glance satisfied Herbert that he was only delineating that which he had himself experienced. The bright gleam of sunshine which ever and anon flushed from his

eyes, and the sweet smile which lighted up his pale cheek with almost a heavenly radiance, proclaimed the deep abiding peace which reigned within.

Before concluding his sermon, Mr. Harland urgently implored all those who as yet had lived only for themselves or the world, to flee to the Cross of Christ, and live from henceforth, not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again. "So," said he, "you shall discover from your own happy experience, what it is to have the peace of God dwelling in your hearts,—what it is to 'rejoice evermore,' even while suffering pain or loss, and passing, it may be, through much tribulation in this the house of your pilgrimage; and after the present life is over, you shall enter into the joy of your Lord."

When Herbert Seymour left the church, it was with a heavy burden resting on his heart, and the consciousness of a true want, of which he had hitherto been ignorant. All his young friends had, contrary to their expectations, been more or less interested in the sermon, but any impression which may have been made on them was speedily effaced. Not so, however, as regards Herbert. In the busy excitement of travelling, weeks and months rolled away; but the words he had listened to on that memorable Sabbath evening were constantly recurring to his mind.

While journeying through the sunny plains of Italy, and gazing on the snow-capped mountains and flowing streams of beautiful Switzerland, he still felt an aching void within—a strange yearning which nothing earthly could satisfy.

Sometimes he would fling himself down upon some grassy bank near a roaring waterfall, and, as he contemplated the solemn grandeur of the prospect which presented itself to his view, his thoughts would rise to the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, while many and sore a longing came over him to be able to say with truth and certainty, "This great God is *my* God."

His companions embraced every opportunity of rallying him upon the loss of spirits, and would fain have persuaded him to drown the voice of conscience by plunging into scenes of revelry and dissipation with which they were themselves already too familiar.

But the good seed was not to be thus destroyed. Sharp and severe were the struggles he experienced, before he could grasp the promise, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out," or comprehend the true ground of the believer's hope; but this once understood, he embraced the pardon freely offered, carried his doubts and fears, his sins and infirmities, and laid them all on the great sin-bearer, the Lamb of God.

Then every sorrow fled! The heavy burden was removed from his heart, the glorious sunshine of God's presence illuminated his soul, and he went on his way rejoicing!

At times he wished that he could have an interview with Mr. Harland, the unconscious instrument of his conversion, but it seemed improbable that he would again have an opportunity of seeing him.

It was now the beginning of August, and the gay party began to talk of moving homewards. Before doing so they agreed to revisit one of the lovely lakes embosomed amongst the snowy mountains, and ramble along its margin. As they reached a point which they had not before seen, the view which burst upon them was truly enchant-

ing; and, regardless of the presence of his friends, Herbert Seymour sat down and silently surveyed the lovely scenery at his leisure.

"Seymour is going to be dull," said Reginald Grafton, in an audible whisper. "I propose that we leave him to enjoy the prospect in his own way while we explore something else."

"Yes," exclaimed Herbert, rousing himself; "do not wait for me. I will join you presently."

Soon their voices died away in the distance, and the young man was left to luxuriate in the noble scene which lay before him. The lofty grandeur of the rugged mountains was to him most imposing, with their hoary heads now and again glistening in the sunlight which also danced athwart the trees and sparkled upon the placid lake, on whose calm bosom was reflected the lovely azure of the summer's sky. No sound broke the stillness which prevailed, only the insect's hum and the gentle twittering of birds with the soft sigh of the zephyr, as it played among the leafy branches which, bending downward, kissed the water's edge.

Herbert fell into a pleasant reverie, but started on hearing a voice behind him saying, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

Then followed a moment's pause, after which the speaker, as if in continuation of the sublime subject, broke forth with, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

"Surely," thought Herbert, "I have heard that voice before; but where?"

There was no time to consider, for the next instant some branches were pushed aside, which had screened him from view, and the new comer stood before him.

It was Mr. Harland!

CHAPTER III.

HERBERT'S INTERVIEW WITH MR. HARLAND.

"Nature hath assigned
Two sovereign remedies for human grief:
Religion, sweetest, firmest, first, and best,
Strength to the weak, and to the wounded balm;
And strenuous action next." SOUTHEY.

SCARCELY remembering in the excitement of the moment that they were strangers to each other, Herbert hastily arose, and, in return for the courteous bow with which Mr. Harland greeted him when he became aware that he was not alone, warmly grasped his hand. Then, conscious of the surprise this would occasion, he asked, "Can you spare a few moments to listen to my reason for thus meeting you rather as a friend than a stranger?"

"Most willingly," replied Mr. Harland, pleasantly. "Perhaps you mistook me for an acquaintance,—to whom I may possibly bear some resemblance,—as I do not think I have ever had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"I have the advantage in this respect," rejoined Herbert, with a smile; "for I have both seen you and heard you preach."

"Is it so? May I ask where?"

"At the village church of P——. Do you remember preaching there some months ago?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Harland, after a moment's reflection. "The subject of my sermon was——"

"Joy!" exclaimed Herbert, with kindling eyes,—"Joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Mr. Harland quickly advanced a step nearer, laid his hand on the young man's arm, and, after gazing earnestly into his handsome, intelligent countenance, he inquired, very gently, "Was it of this you desired to speak?"

"Yes; I wished most heartily to thank you for your appeal on that occasion, and to tell you how deeply I am indebted to you."

He paused, but continued, presently, in a low, suppressed voice, "I had lived until then in utter forgetfulness of God, and without bestowing a single serious thought upon the concerns of my soul."

"And now?" asked Mr. Harland, eagerly.

"Now," he answered, with grave simplicity; "I trust I know something of the blessedness of those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered,—something of that love which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost."

"The Lord's name be praised!" exclaimed the other, in a tone of tremulous delight. "Shall we," he added, reverently lifting his hat —"shall we pray together?"

Side by side they knelt upon the margin of that peaceful lake, while Mr. Harland poured forth his grateful thanks that another soul had been delivered from the bondage of sin—another wanderer brought into the fold; and lovingly he supplicated, on Herbert's

behalf, that he might be kept by the power of God, be strengthened to resist every temptation, and vanquish every foe, until the battle of life should be over, the victory gained, and the crown received.

No words were spoken for some minutes after they rose from their knees, but at length Mr. Harland remarked somewhat abruptly, "A noble work lies before you, my friend. Are you prepared to devote yourself body and soul to the service of Christ?"

"I am," replied Herbert, in a voice of serious determination. "Only tell me *how* I can serve Him."

"Ah!" rejoined Mr. Harland, while a soft smile illumined his countenance. "Saul's prayer must be yours,—'Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?' and if you are really in earnest, you may depend upon receiving an answer. Christ has work for each one of us in His vineyard—work just suited to our peculiar capabilities; and we know for our encouragement that the humblest effort to advance His kingdom, the simplest action performed from love to Him, will be accepted, as well as the greatest. A word spoken—a prayer breathed—an insult borne with patience and meekness—an injury repaid by kindness—a cross cheerfully taken up and carried without a murmur,—all these will meet with His gracious approval. Only do what you can, and, whether it be much or little, He will bless your endeavours. There are, alas! too many," he continued sadly, "even amongst those who profess to be the followers of Jesus, whose affections are so closely entwined around the things of earth, that their lives are necessarily unfruitful, and their spiritual sloth and self-indulgence increase day by day, until there is positively nothing to distinguish them from the people of the world. Against following the example of such, I would most urgently warn you; for Christ and the world ever have been, and ever must be, antagonistic, and His own emphatic words regarding His disciples are, *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* If, therefore, you would make progress in the Divine life, and glorify God by bringing forth much fruit—if you would desire to be conformed to the image of your Lord and Master, following in His footsteps, and being the means of leading sinners to His cross,—live, I beseech you, *above the world.* You will be undoubtedly assailed by it again and again, in some form or another, but manfully resist its every overture. Let neither its deceptive charms, its fleeting pleasures, nor its hollow promises ensnare you, nor its warnings, threatenings, and frowns intimidate you. Its friendship is more to be dreaded than its hatred, and has proved the ruin of thousands."

"I think I comprehend you," said Herbert, in whose mind a new train of thought had been awakened by Mr. Harland's words; "and, God being my helper, I will endeavour to follow your counsel."

"Then you will assuredly succeed," rejoined his companion. "True, you may often be discouraged, may encounter numerous obstacles, and have to fight many battles with enemies strong and powerful, both from within and without; yet, at the last, Christ, who has Himself overcome the world, will give you the victory also. Let this glorious hope animate your heart at all times, and sustain and strengthen you, should you be called upon to endure persecution because of your religion."

Perhaps Herbert's face expressed something like surprise at this word; for Mr. Harland, after observing him intently for a moment,

CHAPTER XLVI.

PAGE

TABLE TALK 195

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE POSTSCRIPT 200

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CHARLES HASTINGS GOES TO ST. PETERSBURG 205

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CARPENTER'S SHED 211

CHAPTER L.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE 216

CHAPTER LI.

HOW HERBERT'S UNINVITED GUESTS WERE ENTERTAINED .. 221

CHAPTER LII.

AN EXPOSE 227

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MEDITATED STRIKE 233

CHAPTER LIV.

THE REJECTED PETITION 239

CHAPTER LV.

MR. SNAPSON COMPELLED TO GIVE IN 245

CHAPTER LVI.

NEW REGULATIONS ESTABLISHED 251

CHAPTER LVII.

ALBERT'S BIRTHDAY PARTY 256

CHAPTER LVIII.

SUMMARY MEASURES TO PREVENT INFECTION 261

CHAPTER LIX.

MYSTERY 265

CHAPTER LX.

VISITORS AT THE PARK 271

CHAPTER LXI.

WILLSON CARRIES HER POINT 276

CHAPTER LXII.

PAGE

MRS. SEYMOUR DECLINES TO RECEIVE REGINALD'S FRIENDS .. 282

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE LETTER BAG 288

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM 293

CHAPTER LXV.

REGINALD'S TREACHERY IS DISCOVERED 299

CHAPTER LXVI.

GOOD AND EVIL TIDINGS 304

CHAPTER LXVII.

ALONE WITH THE DEAD 310

CHAPTER LXVIII.

A WONDERFUL CHANGE 316

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE LONDON PHYSICIAN 321

CHAPTER LXX.

CONQUERED AT LAST 327

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE OLD GALLERY, AND ITS HISTORY 333

CHAPTER LXXII.

ANXIETIES 339

CHAPTER LXXIII.

VISIONS OF THE PAST 345

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE MISSING LETTERS 352

CHAPTER LXXV.

SOPHISM 358

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MRS. MORBY MEETS WITH A CHECK 362

CHAPTER LXXVII.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY 368

PAGE

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HERBERT MAKES A DOUBLE DISCOVERY 375

CHAPTER LXXIX.

PENRUTHVEN MOUNT 382

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED 388

CHAPTER LXXXI.

RELATIVE VALUE OF £20,000 393

CHAPTER LXXXII.

FALSE PRETENCES 398

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE FETE CHAMPETRE 403

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH 409

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE TURN OF TIDE 417

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE LOSS OF THE BURDWAN 425

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

A RENEWING OF THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS 433

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

REUNION 442

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

MRS. SEYMOUR'S WISHES ANTICIPATED 449

CHAPTER XC.

CHRISTMAS EVE 457

CHAPTER XCI.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGE, AND DEATHS 463

MERTONSVILLE PARK.

CHAPTER I.

THE SON'S RETURN.

"This castle hath a pleasant seat."—*Macbeth.*

"The time hangs dreary on us,
And we weary by our lane;
And I doot, I doot, we'll no can rest
Till he come back again."

In one of the spacious and luxuriously furnished drawing-rooms of Mertonsville Park were seated, on a lovely evening in August, a lady and gentleman, whose bearing and conversation proclaimed them to be the owners of the mansion.

A glance through the apartment sufficed to indicate wealth, united with refinement of taste and elegance of design. Exquisite gems of art from various countries, costly paintings and richly carved furniture, polished marbles and antique porcelain, were scattered profusely around. From the open windows a delightful panorama presented itself: a wide expanse of picturesque scenery, replete with nature's loveliest adornments, and lighted up by the glowing rays of the setting sun. In the distance a range of mountains lifted their shadowy summits to the sky, while the fitful windings of the river added grace and beauty to the whole. The grounds belonging to the estate of Mertonsville were extensive, and beautifully laid out, containing shady walks lined with fine old trees, and soft velvety seats, where one could sit for hours gazing at the ever-changing landscape, and listening to the soothing sound of some rushing cascade in the immediate neighbourhood.

Mr. and Mrs. Seymour, the occupants of the drawing-room, were in a state of unusual excitement on this lovely summer's evening; for they were momentarily expecting the arrival of their only son from Dilton, the nearest railway-station; and as the time passed on, Mrs. Seymour grew so eager and restless, that the favourite little spaniel at her feet was unnoticed, and strove in vain to obtain one glance or caress.

Not long, however, had she to exercise her patience; for her quick ear soon detected the sound of approaching wheels on the smoothly gravelled avenue without, and in another moment a tall, slight, finely formed young man, with large, dark, earnest eyes, and a thoughtful.

CHAPTER II.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT.

"Light hath arisen,—we walk in its brightness;
Joy hath descended,—its fulness has come;
Peace hath been spoken,—we hear it, we take it;
Angels are singing, and shall we be dumb?
Calm 'mid the tempest around us that rages;
'Mid the lone weariness, ever at rest;
Silent amid the rude uproar of voices;
Sometimes disquieted,—never opprest.
Happy in Him who hath loved us and bought us,
Rich in the life which He gives to His own,
Filled with the peace passing all understanding,
Never less lonely than just when alone."

Hymns of Faith and Hope.

LATE one Saturday, not long after setting out on their journey, the gay party arrived at the quiet little village of P——, being driven thither by the desire of visiting a noted waterfall a few miles distant. They had previously arranged to devote the Sabbath to this object, but to their great disappointment were unable to do so, owing to a heavy and prolonged storm of wind and rain which kept them confined to their hotel.

Dark and louring clouds hung like a thick drapery above, and the deep-toned roll of thunder and oft-repeated flash of lightning mingled with the torrents of rain which poured incessantly.

The first part of the morning passed gloomily enough, for nearly all the young men were chafed and irritated at the delay, and in no way disposed to make the best of the position in which they were unavoidably placed.

Their luggage had been left at a neighbouring town, whither they expected to return the next day; so that they were unprovided with books or any other means of beguiling the hours of the Sabbath.

At last they summoned their landlord, and entreated him to furnish them with some amusement; but, shaking his head, he said he feared there was nothing that would interest them, "unless," as he was about to withdraw, "*cards* would be acceptable."

"The very thing!" eagerly cried the young men; "bring them at once."

The man returned in a few moments, and laid the cards on the table. They were instantly taken possession of, and soon the friends, absorbed in the exciting game, seemed oblivious to all around them, and no longer spent their time in passing animadversions on the weather. And, alas! they were also unmindful of the command which should have been ringing in their ears—"*Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.*"

Towards evening the atmosphere gradually cleared, and the rain ceased to pour with the same violence as in the former part of the day.

Tired of remaining indoors so long, they were all thinking of venturing out, when they received another visit from their landlord, who said, with a very perceptible degree of hesitation, "Excuse me for mentioning it, but there is a stranger going to preach in the church at seven—a Mr. Harland, who is travelling for the benefit of his health, and is, I have heard, a very superior preacher." Receiving no answer to this information, he added abruptly, "Perhaps you might wish to go and hear him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Reginald Grafton, one of the most boisterous among them, "cards in the morning and church in the evening; this is your creed, is it, my good friend?" And his loud mocking laugh sadly disconcerted the timid but well-meaning landlord, who had been reproaching himself for having encouraged those under his roof to break the Sabbath.

"Well, Grafton," said another, with a yawn, "after all, his proposition is a very sensible one. This confounded weather will prevent our seeing anything of the country until to-morrow; therefore I, for one, vote that we take his advice."

There was a little demur at first, as this unexpected suggestion was made, but on the whole it was received with satisfaction; and at the appointed time the pleasure-seeking group were quietly seated in the house of God.

The prayers were conducted by the clergyman belonging to the parish, and at their conclusion Mr. Harland took his place in the pulpit. He was about thirty years of age, pale and feeble looking, but with a countenance of singular sweetness—indicating firmness and resolution, united with gentleness of disposition and energy of purpose.

A swift, keen glance he threw around him; then in full, rich tones announced his text, and proceeded with his sermon.

The subject was "Joy unspeakable, and full of glory;" and as calmly, but with deep earnestness, he spoke of the joy which it is each believer's privilege to possess even on earth,—contrasting it with the false and fleeting pleasures of the world; the one so real and unfading, the other a mere shadow, which only remains for an instant, and then passes away for ever,—he succeeded in concentrating the devout attention of his hearers. The impressive fervour of his manner, coupled with the eloquence of his language, sent a strange thrill of emotion through Herbert Seymour's frame, and caused him to listen to each word with intense interest.

To him all was new. Of religion he had learned but little, and that little had been presented to his mind in so gloomy and unattractive a garb, that he considered everything relating to it in the light of an irksome duty, to be postponed as long as possible. *Now*, for the first time, he was told that it was not so much a duty to be performed, as a most delightful privilege to be enjoyed; and when Mr. Harland went on to describe the effect of this joy, and by his striking imagery and lovely examples explained what it had often done for its possessors amidst the deepest sorrows, the loneliest hours,—in times of poverty and suffering, and in the immediate presence of death itself,—he became sensible that to this he was an utter stranger. To doubt the speaker's sincerity was impossible; one glance satisfied Herbert that he was only delineating that which he had himself experienced. The bright gleam of sunshine which ever and anon flushed from his

eyes, and the sweet smile which lighted up his pale cheek with almost a heavenly radiance, proclaimed the deep abiding peace which reigned within.

Before concluding his sermon, Mr. Harland urgently implored all those who as yet had lived only for themselves or the world, to flee to the Cross of Christ, and live from henceforth, not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again. "So," said he, "you shall discover from your own happy experience, what it is to have the peace of God dwelling in your hearts,—what it is to 'rejoice evermore,' even while suffering pain or loss, and passing, it may be, through much tribulation in this the house of your pilgrimage; and after the present life is over, you shall enter into the joy of your Lord."

When Herbert Seymour left the church, it was with a heavy burden resting on his heart, and the consciousness of a true want, of which he had hitherto been ignorant. All his young friends had, contrary to their expectations, been more or less interested in the sermon, but any impression which may have been made on them was speedily effaced. Not so, however, as regards Herbert. In the busy excitement of travelling, weeks and months rolled away; but the words he had listened to on that memorable Sabbath evening were constantly recurring to his mind.

While journeying through the sunny plains of Italy, and gazing on the snow-capped mountains and flowing streams of beautiful Switzerland, he still felt an aching void within—a strange yearning which nothing earthly could satisfy.

Sometimes he would fling himself down upon some grassy bank near a roaring waterfall, and, as he contemplated the solemn grandeur of the prospect which presented itself to his view, his thoughts would rise to the almighty Maker of heaven and earth, while many and sore a longing came over him to be able to say with truth and certainty, "This great God is *my* God."

His companions embraced every opportunity of rallying him upon the loss of spirits, and would fain have persuaded him to drown the voice of conscience by plunging into scenes of revelry and dissipation with which they were themselves already too familiar.

But the good seed was not to be thus destroyed. Sharp and severe were the struggles he experienced, before he could grasp the promise, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out," or comprehend the true ground of the believer's hope; but this once understood, he embraced the pardon freely offered, carried his doubts and fears, his sins and infirmities, and laid them all on the great sin-bearer, the Lamb of God.

Then every sorrow fled! The heavy burden was removed from his heart, the glorious sunshine of God's presence illuminated his soul, and he went on his way rejoicing!

At times he wished that he could have an interview with Mr. Harland, the unconscious instrument of his conversion, but it seemed improbable that he would again have an opportunity of seeing him.

It was now the beginning of August, and the gay party began to talk of moving homewards. Before doing so they agreed to revisit one of the lovely lakes embosomed amongst the snowy mountains, and ramble along its margin. As they reached a point which they had not before seen, the view which burst upon them was truly enchant-

ing; and, regardless of the presence of his friends, Herbert Seymour sat down and silently surveyed the lovely scenery at his leisure.

"Seymour is going to be dull," said Reginald Grafton, in an audible whisper. "I propose that we leave him to enjoy the prospect in his own way while we explore something else."

"Yes," exclaimed Herbert, rousing himself; "do not wait for me. I will join you presently."

Soon their voices died away in the distance, and the young man was left to luxuriate in the noble scene which lay before him. The lofty grandeur of the rugged mountains was to him most imposing, with their hoary heads now and again glistening in the sunlight which also danced athwart the trees and sparkled upon the placid lake, on whose calm bosom was reflected the lovely azure of the summer's sky. No sound broke the stillness which prevailed, only the insect's hum and the gentle twittering of birds, with the soft sigh of the zephyr, as it played among the leafy branches which, bending downward, kissed the water's edge.

Herbert fell into a pleasant reverie, but started on hearing a voice behind him saying, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

Then followed a moment's pause, after which the speaker, as if in continuation of the sublime subject, broke forth with, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

"Surely," thought Herbert, "I have heard that voice before; but where?"

There was no time to consider, for the next instant some branches were pushed aside, which had screened him from view, and the new comer stood before him.

It was Mr. Harland!

CHAPTER III.

HERBERT'S INTERVIEW WITH MR. HARLAND.

"Nature hath assigned
Two sovereign remedies for human grief:
Religion, sweetest, firmest, first, and best,
Strength to the weak, and to the wounded balm;
And strenuous action next." SOUTHEY.

SCARCELY remembering in the excitement of the moment that they were strangers to each other, Herbert hastily arose, and, in return for the courteous bow with which Mr. Harland greeted him when he became aware that he was not alone, warmly grasped his hand. Then, conscious of the surprise this would occasion, he asked, "Can you spare a few moments to listen to my reason for thus meeting you rather as a friend than a stranger?"

"Most willingly," replied Mr. Harland, pleasantly. "Perhaps you mistook me for an acquaintance,—to whom I may possibly bear some resemblance,—as I do not think I have ever had the pleasure of seeing you before."

"I have the advantage in this respect," rejoined Herbert, with a smile; "for I have both seen you and heard you preach."

"Is it so? May I ask where?"

"At the village church of P——. Do you remember preaching there some months ago?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Harland, after a moment's reflection. "The subject of my sermon was——"

"Joy!" exclaimed Herbert, with kindling eyes,—"Joy unspeakable, and full of glory."

Mr. Harland quickly advanced a step nearer, laid his hand on the young man's arm, and, after gazing earnestly into his handsome, intelligent countenance, he inquired, very gently, "Was it of this you desired to speak?"

"Yes; I wished most heartily to thank you for your appeal on that occasion, and to tell you how deeply I am indebted to you."

He paused, but continued, presently, in a low, suppressed voice, "I had lived until then in utter forgetfulness of God, and without bestowing a single serious thought upon the concerns of my soul."

"And now?" asked Mr. Harland, eagerly.

"Now," he answered, with grave simplicity; "I trust I know something of the blessedness of those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered,—something of that love which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost."

"The Lord's name be praised!" exclaimed the other, in a tone of tremulous delight. "Shall we," he added, reverently lifting his hat —"shall we pray together?"

Side by side they knelt upon the margin of that peaceful lake, while Mr. Harland poured forth his grateful thanks that another soul had been delivered from the bondage of sin—another wanderer brought into the fold; and lovingly he supplicated, on Herbert's

behalf, that he might be kept by the power of God, be strengthened to resist every temptation, and vanquish every foe, until the battle of life should be over, the victory gained, and the crown received.

No words were spoken for some minutes after they rose from their knees, but at length Mr. Harland remarked somewhat abruptly, "A noble work lies before you, my friend. Are you prepared to devote yourself body and soul to the service of Christ?"

"I am," replied Herbert, in a voice of serious determination. "Only tell me *how* I can serve Him."

"Ah!" rejoined Mr. Harland, while a soft smile illumined his countenance. "Saul's prayer must be yours,—'Lord, what wilt *Thou* have me to do?' and if you are really in earnest, you may depend upon receiving an answer. Christ has work for each one of us in His vineyard—work just suited to our peculiar capabilities; and we know for our encouragement that the humblest effort to advance His kingdom, the simplest action performed from love to Him, will be accepted, as well as the greatest. A word spoken—a prayer breathed—an insult borne with patience and meekness—an injury repaid by kindness—a cross cheerfully taken up and carried without a murmur,—all these will meet with His gracious approval. Only do what you can, and, whether it be much or little, He will bless your endeavours. There are, alas! too many," he continued sadly, "even amongst those who profess to be the followers of Jesus, whose affections are so closely entwined around the things of earth, that their lives are necessarily unfruitful, and their spiritual sloth and self-indulgence increase day by day, until there is positively nothing to distinguish them from the people of the world. Against following the example of such, I would most urgently warn you; for Christ and the world ever have been, and ever must be, antagonistic, and His own emphatic words regarding His disciples are, *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.* If, therefore, you would make progress in the Divine life, and glorify God by bringing forth much fruit—if you would desire to be conformed to the image of your Lord and Master, following in His footsteps, and being the means of leading sinners to His cross,—live, I beseech you, *above the world.* You will be undoubtedly assailed by it again and again, in some form or another, but manfully resist its every overture. Let neither its deceptive charms, its fleeting pleasures, nor its hollow promises ensnare you, nor its warnings, threatenings, and frowns intimidate you. Its friendship is more to be dreaded than its hatred, and has proved the ruin of thousands."

"I think I comprehend you," said Herbert, in whose mind a new train of thought had been awakened by Mr. Harland's words; "and, God being my helper, I will endeavour to follow your counsel."

"Then you will assuredly succeed," rejoined his companion. "True, you may often be discouraged, may encounter numerous obstacles, and have to fight many battles with enemies strong and powerful, both from within and without; yet, at the last, Christ, who has Himself overcome the world, will give you the victory also. Let this glorious hope animate your heart at all times, and sustain and strengthen you, should you be called upon to endure persecution because of your religion."

Perhaps Herbert's face expressed something like surprise at this word; for Mr. Harland, after observing him intently for a moment,

went on,—" 'All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,' said the Apostle Paul; and it is so to this day. How many, even in our own highly favoured country, are there who daily pass through much tribulation, suffer much persecution, for Christ's sake! A thousand slights wound their gentle spirits, a thousand taunting words sink deep into their bleeding hearts. The arrows of sarcasm are unsparingly showered on them: suffering far keener than any which could be inflicted on the body is allotted to them; their best and holiest actions are mercilessly exposed to ridicule and contempt, and, perhaps, the motives which actuated them called in question. And," he murmured in a soft, sad voice, " often—too often—a man's foes are those of his own household—those for whom he would cheerfully lay down his life."

He paused, and remained with his eyes fixed upon some distant object, apparently quite unconscious of Herbert's presence. The latter felt his sympathies strongly drawn towards him, and, lightly touching his arm, he said feelingly, " You, too, have suffered."

Mr. Harland started. " Pardon my abstraction," he answered, returning Herbert's look of respectful tenderness with one of equal friendliness. " Yes, my friend, from you I will not disguise the fact: I *have* suffered deeply—intensely."

" I was sure of it," exclaimed Herbert. " I knew that——"

" But I was not thinking of myself when I spoke as I did," added the good man, quickly, a beautiful smile lighting up his countenance; " it would be strange, indeed, if I were to dwell on my griefs,—I, who have such unspeakable glories in prospect,—glories which will be mine almost immediately; for, while your race is only just begun, mine is nearly over. A few short months at most, and I shall have passed through the swellings of Jordan, and entered the pilgrim's rest. You look surprised and grieved, my dear sir; but to me this knowledge affords nothing but unmingled pleasure. My only wish in the matter is, that if it be God's will, I may be permitted to work for Him to the very end. I can do little now in the way of preaching: but even in this foreign land opportunities are sometimes granted me for speaking a word in season. And where I am not admitted, these "—taking a bundle of tracts and small books from his pocket, written in the French, German, and Italian languages—" find an entrance. And who knows what may be accomplished by such silent, yet withal eloquent messengers? "

" But is there no hope of your recovery? " inquired Herbert, with a face of grave concern. " May you not be mistaken in supposing——"

" I know what you would say," he replied, " and thank you most sincerely for taking such a kind interest in my welfare; but I dare not deceive you; this will, in all human probability, be our last interview on earth; for to-morrow I must hasten farther south, and you and your friends are, you say, on the point of returning to England."

He was about to say more, when a sudden shout of boisterous laughter startled them both, and warned them that they would soon be disturbed; and glad, perhaps, to end a conversation which was, he saw, becoming very painful to Herbert, Mr. Harland fervently pressed his hand, and murmured gently, but with deep solemnity,—" And now, my brother, I bid you God-speed! Run with patience the race set before you—*looking unto Jesus.* And may He bless, preserve, and keep you, now and for ever. Amen."

Thus they parted; and Herbert, with a sorrowful heart, went to join his companions who were in search of him, while Mr. Harland pursued his way in an opposite direction.

The two never met again; but Herbert had long cause to remember with gratitude their one interview.

Mr. Harland's words were still fresh in his memory, when he at length arrived at Mertonsville, where, as we have already seen, he received a loving welcome from his parents, which could not, however, prevent his feeling somewhat agitated when he reflected upon what might be the probable consequence of his announcing the change which had taken place in him during his absence from them.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRIST OR THE WORLD.

"As genial as sunshine,
Like warmth to impart,
Is a kind-spoken word
From a kind-hearted heart." *Anon.*

THE next morning rose brightly upon the inmates of Mertonsville Park. Herbert Seymour was early astir; and as he looked from his window upon the variegated landscape, and beheld the glorious sunlight shining upon the sparkling river, and heard the soft, low sigh of the fresh morning breeze amongst the luxuriant foliage of the trees, he fancied his home had never yet appeared half so lovely; for now he could view each blooming flower which shed its fragrance around, point to the glittering sunshine making the dewdrops twinkle like so many diamonds, gaze upon the shadowy mountains, and say, "I *see my Father's* hand in all,—each object proclaims His love!

The extreme loveliness of the morning tempted him to take a short ramble through the grounds before breakfast."

He had not proceeded far, when, coming in sight of the conservatories, it suddenly occurred to him to examine a favourite exotic plant, in the culture of which he had formerly taken an interest; but finding all the doors locked, he rapidly walked towards the gardener's cottage in order to procure the keys. Just as he approached the pretty flower-covered porch, and was about to knock, he heard the gardener's voice as if engaged in reading aloud.

Not wishing to disturb him, he softly drew nearer, when through the open window the words fell with perfect clearness on his ear, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust."

A glad smile shone on Herbert's face as he drank in these beautiful words of holy writ: he almost felt as if a special messenger had been despatched from the bright realms of glory to cheer and refresh his soul just when he needed encouragement.

After the conclusion of the psalm there was a pause, and then the same voice was raised in prayer. Few and simple were the words uttered, for George Lisburn was a plain, untutored man, who by untiring industry and perseverance qualified himself for the situation he had now held for upwards of thirty years as a confidential and valued servant in Mr. Seymour's family. No studied language or thrilling eloquence was his; yet as he poured forth his fervent petitions with childlike confidence and faith, as if from the depths of a heart overflowing with love to God, Herbert could not refrain from softly exclaiming, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

When the prayer was ended, he tapped lightly at the door, which was immediately opened by Lisburn himself, who gazed at him with mingled surprise and pleasure; and on learning the purpose for which he had come, he at once accompanied him to the conservatories.

Silently they pursued their way for a few minutes; but a
Herbert remarked to his humble companion, "Well, Lisburn
have begun the day in a profitable manner."
"In a profitable manner!" echoed the gardener, quite pu
"What can you mean, sir?"
"I did not like disturbing you," explained Herbert; "so I
outside your door until your devotions were concluded; and
reminded of the words of the Psalmist,—'My voice shalt Tho
in the morning, O Lord.'"
Lisburn glanced furtively at him while he was speaking,
endeavouring to comprehend the humour of his gay young ma
observing the expression of his face: then he said deprecat
"Excuse me, sir; I have no wish to appear presuming, but
it is not right to jest on so serious a subject."
"Very true, Lisburn. You are, however, mistaken in sup
that I am not in earnest. Does it appear so strange to yo
added, as he saw that Lisburn stood transfixed with astonis
"that I, too, should have been brought to love the Lord, and t
it one of my chief delights to read His Word and pray to Him
"And is this really the case?" asked Lisburn, still looking
what bewildered.
"Yes. Thank God, I can say, 'The Lord is my light and
vation,'" was the gladsome answer.
"Bless His holy name!" fervently ejaculated the pious ol
as soon as his pleasurable emotion enabled him to speak.
scarcely believe it at first; it seemed too good to be true.
just tell me how it came about, sir?"
"Wonderful! most wonderful!" he exclaimed, in a tone o
felt delight, when Herbert had briefly mentioned what he was
of knowing: "Who could have supposed that you would
brought to the knowledge of the truth at such an apparently
time?"
"You know, Lisburn," rejoined Herbert, "God's thoughts
our thoughts, nor His ways our ways; and frequently, when
expect it, He sends the blessing we require."
"And your father?" asked the other presently, with a little
tunity of telling him," yet; but I intend to embrace the firs
"He knows nothing
"I think you are right, sir," said Lisburn, "in——"
He stopped abruptly, and passed his hand twice across his
as if some painful thought had suddenly revisited his mem
quickly recovering himself, he continued earnestly,—"Tak
man's advice, my dear young sir, and don't suffer yourself t
disheartened, even though my master should seem annoyed
first bears of this change. Just cast your every burden on
and patiently wait His time; and if He sends you trial,
also impart grace and strength to enable you to endure the
"Thank you, my good friend," said Herbert, seizing the
hand—to his no little surprise—and shaking it heartily.
I have seen you, for last night I felt greatly depressed in
reflected on the future; I almost feared I was alone—the
Mertonsville who cared for these things; but I know bett
shall go away strengthened and refreshed."
"Ah," mused Lisburn, as he watched the young man

figure, "how prone we all are to feel thus at times! we forget that while Jesus lives His people can never really be alone, for He has promised to be with them even unto the end of the world. But," he added, turning briskly round, and walking in the direction of his own cottage, "I must carry the good news to my wife; it will make her very heart glad."

Herbert, meanwhile, had re-entered the house, and joined his parents, who were taking their seats at the breakfast table.

After making several abortive attempts to introduce the subject which occupied his thoughts, he was obliged to put it off until the meal was over. Then he was preparing to plunge into the matter without any useless circumlocution, but Mrs. Seymour suddenly prevented him by saying, "Do you know, Herbert, that Lady Clifford's ball takes place to-morrow night?"

"I was not aware of it," he answered absently.

"How unfortunate it would have been," she continued, "had you arrived too late for it!"

"Now is my time," thought Herbert. Yet even as he thus decided there came a rush of mingled feeling into his heart; for though on the one hand he was conscious that it would be inconsistent for a professing Christian to mingle with the pleasure-seeking throng, and join in the fascinating engagements of Lady Clifford's brilliant assembly, yet on the other he was assailed by the artful deceiver, who endeavoured with his usual subtlety to persuade him that it was his duty to obey the wishes of his parents.

"You need not," suggested the wily tempter, "make a practice of yielding to these things. But surely *for once* it can do you no harm, and will give them gratification. Say, therefore, nothing at present. After the ball you can explain how matters stand with you."

Shall the tempter succeed in drawing Herbert a step out of the narrow path? Will he with his specious arguments prevail, and induce the young Christian soldier to lay down his arms for a moment, and go over to the enemy? No! Another thought flashed like a ray of heaven-born light into his mind,—"No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

It was enough! Christ must be followed at any cost.

"Mother," said the young man, "I should be grieved to cause you or my father any disappointment; but if you will listen to me for a few moments, I think you will see that I could not well accompany you to-morrow night."

"Not go to Lady Clifford's ball!" cried Mrs. Seymour, in amazement. "Why——"

"Wait an instant, my dear," quietly interposed her husband, "and let us first hear what he has to say."

Then Herbert commenced his task by plainly explaining his meaning, and mentioning the motives which actuated him in renouncing many things which he had been accustomed to regard as essential to happiness; and, while firmly intimating his desire of devoting himself henceforth to the service of his Lord and Saviour, he also assured them that on every other point—save where his conscience forbade—it would be his aim to render prompt obedience to their slightest wish.

As he thus spoke, a variety of changes chased themselves in quick succession over Mr. Seymour's countenance. First, he simply looked amused; then surprised: but as his son went on, these gave place to an expression of grave sternness; and when Herbert had ended, he

said to him in a tone of extreme displeasure, "How you could have made up your mind to act in this ridiculous manner I cannot conceive; but, as you really appear to be infected with these fanciful notions, all I can do is to advise you to get rid of them at the outset."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Herbert, gently.

Almost involuntarily Mr. Seymour started, and frowning ominously, he continued,—"Everything like cant and fanaticism I detest, and will not excuse it—no, not even in you; and if this is *my* sentiment, what will others say, should you persist in acting up to these extraordinary ideas? Why, the consequence will be, that even amongst your best friends you will be an object of ridicule and contempt."

"I must risk it," answered Herbert. "Even my Master, who was holy and harmless, did not escape; and it is not for me, His follower, to shrink from anything He may have ordained for me."

Mr. Seymour was perplexed and astonished; for he knew that in days gone by the most distant allusion of this kind would have raised his son's spirit and pride together. Now, as he glanced at him, he could not help perceiving the calm look of peace which reposed upon his unruffled brow; and for a moment he was touched.

The next time he spoke it was in a somewhat kinder tone. "Nonsense, my boy; you are placing difficulties in your own way: the things you object to are really in themselves quite harmless. Thousands of good Christians are constantly seen at balls and other like places of amusement, and why should you affect to be better than others? Come now," he added in a more persuasive manner, "be reasonable, and give up these absurd fancies before you go farther."

Herbert shook his head sadly. "It cannot be. O my father!" he pleaded in an earnestly touching voice, "do not, I beseech you, oppose me in this thing; suffer me to go on in the way I feel I ought, and be assured you will never repent of your kindness."

"I *cannot* let you alone," retorted Mr. Seymour, the red flush of anger mounting to his forehead, "and see you disgrace yourself and your family."

"Oh! surely not disgrace."

"Yes, I repeat it, disgrace!" And there was a bitter emphasis upon the word, which made it grate more harshly on Herbert's ear.

He did not reply, for he felt how useless it would be to say anything further, especially as Mr. Seymour was already much exasperated.

Presently the latter rose, and saying loftily, "We will not continue this unpleasant subject longer at present; you shall have time to think over my advice, and I doubt not, ere many weeks have gone by, you will be yourself again," he hastily left the room.

Herbert was the first to speak after his departure. "My dear mother," he said, gazing wistfully into her face; "I fear I have displeased you as well as my father."

"Displeased me!" she answered quickly. "Oh, no! surprise, not anger, has kept me silent."

Herbert thanked her by a look of gratitude; and she continued regretfully,—"I am sorry that you did not think of speaking to me alone on the subject first. However, it is useless to talk of that now. Are you quite sure," she added, hesitatingly, "that it is your duty to deprive yourself of so much enjoyment?"

"Worldly amusements afford me no pleasure now," he replied, with a frank smile; "having obtained the substance, I no longer desire the shadow."

"I understand you a little, Herbert," said Mrs. Seymour, hurriedly; "for once I, too, thought—but no matter——" And she suddenly checked herself. Then, forcing a laugh which sounded strangely unnatural, she exclaimed, starting abruptly from her seat, and going towards the door, "I promised to drive with Mrs. Hastings this morning, so I am obliged to leave you, as I do not wish to keep her waiting. Will you ring the bell, my dear, and order the carriage?"

Herbert turned to fulfil this request; but before he could do more than lay his hand upon the bell, he felt his mother's arms wind lovingly around him, and heard her say, in a low, agitated voice, "I cannot go without telling you that I feel you are right; but, oh! my darling Herbert, I tremble for you."

"You feel that I am right," cried Herbert, joyfully; "then will not you also, my own dear mother, seek——"

"No, no," she said, interrupting him, while a quick look of pain passed over her features, "I could not act as you have done; to know what is right, and to practise it, are two very different things."

"Different, indeed," began Herbert, gravely; but ere he could conclude his sentence, Mrs. Seymour had left him.

Noiselessly she crossed the wide hall, ascended the stairs, and with an uneasy expression upon her countenance, entered her dressing-room, where—after carefully fastening the door—she sat down among the cushions of a luxurious couch, and allowed herself a few moments for serious reflection.

A chord had been touched in her heart, the vibrations of which thrilled through her every nerve. Memory, starting up at the unwonted sound, brought many past events—long since buried in forgetfulness—most vividly before her.

She saw as in a dream herself once more a young and blooming girl, just standing on the threshold of womanhood, and also the form of her Christian mother; and as she again listened to the gentle words which fell from that mother's lips—words of warning and entreaty—she remembered how fondly she had loved her; how frequently she had mused on the holy consistency of her character; how ardently she had longed to resemble her; and how, time after time, in answer to her earnest pleadings, she had promised to yield herself unto Christ.

Then the scene was changed, and she found herself suddenly placed in one of the most perilous positions it is perhaps possible for a young girl to occupy. The undisputed possession of wealth, beauty, and accomplishment; brought out into the full glare of worldly pomp and show, without the corrective influence of a mother's watchful care, she was courted and caressed by those who surrounded her, praised by friends, flattered by dependants, and admired by all for her grace and loveliness; until one by one her early impressions faded, every serious thought was banished from her mind; and when at length the time came for her to make a firm stand, either for Christ or the world, she unhesitatingly chose the latter for her portion, and hushed the voice of conscience, which bade her beware, lest, gaining the world, she should lose her soul.

These reminiscences were not pleasant; and after struggling with them awhile, Mrs. Seymour succeeded in locking with a determined hand the chamber of memory; and, smothering a deep sigh, which told of the evanescent and unsatisfactory nature of the joys she had so eagerly sought, she prepared herself for her drive.

CHAPTER V.

CONFESSING CHRIST.

"If I know how to manage these affairs,
Thus thrust disorderly upon my hands——
Never believe me." *Richard II.*

AFTER his mother's departure, Herbert passed some hours alone, thinking over the events of the morning, and seeking guidance and strength for what yet lay before him.

The manner in which his communication had been received by Mr. Seymour chilled and disappointed him, but he encouraged himself in the hope that, by invariably yielding ready compliance to his wishes whenever they were conformable to the sacred duty he owed to God —who, as his Creator and Redeemer, claimed his supreme affection and filial obedience—he might be enabled eventually to disarm opposition and conquer prejudice.

At length his meditations were brought to an abrupt termination by the unceremonious entrance, and somewhat noisy greeting, of a young man named Charles Hastings, who, on account of his having been from his earliest boyhood Herbert's chosen friend and playmate, was considered quite a privileged person at Mertonsville, and allowed to come and go just when and how he pleased.

"Welcome home, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, rushing impetuously forward, and seizing Herbert's hand in both his own. "How are you after your wanderings?"

"Very well, and glad to see you once more," replied Herbert, warmly.

Then followed an animated conversation, in the course of which Mr. Hastings detailed some of the most interesting occurrences that had taken place in the neighbourhood during his friend's absence.

Herbert could scarcely restrain a smile, while listening to his witty remarks and humorous anecdotes; but ere long he was saddened at the tone of reckless levity with which he spoke on every subject, however serious, and a pang of remorse came across him as he remembered how much of his own life had been thus wasted in vain, foolish, and unprofitable conversation.

All unconscious of this feeling, his companion rattled on for a considerable time, until, having at last exhausted his experience of the past, he turned to the future. "By the bye, Herbert, you will, of course, join our party, as usual, at the D—— races? I only hope we may find as much enjoyment as we have hitherto done. Do you recollect the last time we attended them together?"

"Yes."

"And the very active part we ourselves took on the occasion?"

"I have not forgotten that either," was the grave reply.

Charles Hastings laughed, and observed significantly, "It would be strange if you had; for some of our adventures were—— But what is the matter?" he interrupted himself to ask, as for the first time he took note of the expression of Herbert's face. "Does not the retrospect please you?"

"Far from it, my dear Charles."

"And wherefore? if I may ask the question."

"Because the end of these things is death."

"Herbert!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings, starting up and looking anxiously at him, "did you not tell me that you were quite well?"

"Yes; and I said truly; nevertheless, I shall not be at the races this year."

"And wherefore?" again inquired his companion, in a lighter tone, as he resumed his seat.

"A few words will suffice to explain my reason." Herbert rose as he spoke, and opening his Bible, which lay on the table, read, slowly and distinctly, "'Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all* to the glory of God.'"

Surprise, perplexity, and inquiry were visible on Mr. Hastings' countenance, but other response he made none; and after regarding him reflectively for a minute, Herbert continued,—"Now, from henceforth I intend to take this Book as my guide and counsellor. You will, therefore, readily perceive that, this being so, I cannot consistently join in those worldly amusements which bring no glory to God, and on which I dare not ask His blessing."

"I perceive nothing of the kind," muttered Charles Hastings, in an under-tone, while a half-contemptuous smile curled his lips. "But," he added,—a sudden doubt crossing his mind,—"are you not trying to play off some joke upon me, just for the pleasure of laughing at my credulity?"

"Do I look as if I were joking?"

"No, verily, you look serious enough," he replied, after eyeing him with a glance of keen penetration; "*that* I must admit."

"You are right, my friend,—I am serious. Since I last saw you I have been made a partaker of joys far superior to any I had ever known or experienced before; and, having myself discovered the secret of true and abiding happiness, I am naturally——"

"And what is this wonderful secret? You have not told me yet," said Mr. Hastings, incredulously.

With gravity, simplicity, and deep emphasis, the answer was given, "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

A transient expression of mingled curiosity and uneasiness passed over Charles Hastings' countenance; he, however, merely made a gesture of impatience, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "It's incredible!" Then, resuming his wonted vivacious manner, he turned, with an amused smile, to Herbert, and said, carelessly, "I suppose I ought to congratulate you, my dear fellow; but really you must excuse me, for I do not understand it in the least,"—adding mentally, "or you either."

"Have you any wish to understand it?" asked Herbert, quickly; "you can scarcely imagine how much happiness it would give me if I could induce you to——"

"Oh, spare me!" cried the young man, lifting up both his hands, and assuming an expression of consternation and alarm; "I assure you the sermon is quite sufficient without the application! The fact is," he went on more seriously, "my present position satisfies me well, and I see no reason why I should wish to change it. I am not worse than others, neither do I pretend to be better."

"Will you tell me," said Herbert laying his hand lightly upon his

friend's shoulder, and speaking very gently, "what advantage you expect to derive on account of this?"

"What advantage!" he repeated, looking puzzled. "Why, is it not an advantage?"

"I read in this book, 'Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil,' and 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished.'"

"Well, you certainly do not flatter me," returned Mr. Hastings, half offended. "Do you mean to intimate that that is my condition?"

"Forgive me, dear Charles, if I speak too plainly; but as there are only two classes, the righteous and the wicked, you must of course belong to one of them. You are either walking in the broad road that leads to destruction, or the narrow path of life."

"But surely a man can be a Christian without making a parade of his religion by acting differently to any one else."

"There must be a difference," remarked Herbert, thoughtfully, "between those who follow Christ and those who reject Him. The latter live unto themselves, and serve sin, and love the world; the former are the servants of God: the language of their hearts and lives is, 'We are not our own, we are bought with a price—even the precious blood of Christ; therefore we cheerfully yield ourselves, body and soul, to Him, and in all things seek to glorify Him.'"

Charles Hastings shook his head doubtfully, and said, "If this is what you mean by being a Christian, I do not wonder at your hesitating to call me one."

"But this very moment you may be made one," exclaimed his companion, eagerly, "if you are only willing."

For a few seconds he remained silent, looking at Herbert with a wistful expression on his face; but presently his emotion passed away, and he remarked, in his own frank, good-humoured manner, "You will not, I trust, allow anything to interfere with the friendship we have hitherto enjoyed. Let us each follow our own way, and in this one particular agree to differ. What do you say?—is it a bargain?"

Herbert smiled as he answered, "I see nothing to prevent our still continuing friends—not, perhaps, such close ones as we once were; for in our future intercourse something will, I fear, be lacking which we have hitherto possessed."

"And what may that be?" inquired the young man, curiously.

"Unison of thought and feeling. The things which I esteem as all-important, you will make light of, and——"

"Herbert! I thought you knew me better," said his visitor, reproachfully. "Do you suppose that because I do not consider it necessary to make such a literal renouncement of the 'pomps and vanities of this wicked world,' I must needs interfere with those who do? It is just possible," he added lightly, with the air of one dismissing an unpleasant subject, "that at some future period I, too, may be induced to alter my opinion, and if ever such a contingency occur, I shall not fail to apply to you for sympathy and advice."

"And welcome you will be," returned Herbert, gently. "But let me remind you that the present, and it only, is yours. 'Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation!'"

Mr. Hastings had no wish to linger after that. He rose quickly, took up his hat, and was in the act of bidding Herbert a hasty adieu,

when his purpose met with an interruption by the entrance of Mr. Seymour, who, after casting an almost imperceptible glance round the room, advanced towards him, and, shaking him cordially by the hand, proposed that he should remain with them until the evening.

"You will meet several of your friends at dinner," he said, seeing that the young man was about to decline his invitation. "Among the rest Mrs. Granville and her daughters."

The effect which this information had upon him seemed to be just what Mr. Seymour expected. Only for a moment did he hesitate before signifying his willingness to accede to the other's wishes, in spite of his having, as he laughingly declared, engaged to dine elsewhere.

"I thought you could not refuse me," said Mr. Seymour, smiling complacently; "and I am sure your society will be most acceptable to Herbert, who, as you may probably have discovered, is in rather a melancholy frame of mind to-day."

Mr. Hastings was slightly embarrassed, scarcely knowing what reply to make, when, to his relief, Mrs. Seymour appeared at the door, and asking Herbert to accompany her to the drawing-room, where some friends were waiting to see him, she took his arm and led him away. Mr. Seymour and Charles Hastings slowly followed them; and the former, again adverting to the subject which occupied his thoughts, said in a low, confidential tone, "Charles, I want your help and co-operation."

"If I could assist you, I would willingly offer my services," he replied, somewhat reluctantly. "But I really do not see that I can be of any use."

"More perhaps than you imagine. You possess great influence with Herbert, and may be successful in dissuading him from the false, rash step he contemplates taking."

"I fear not, sir."

"Does he then appear so very determined?" asked Mr. Seymour, in a voice which expressed both displeasure and chagrin.

"He certainly seems to have made up his mind how to act; for he has just told me not to expect him at the D—— races."

"What confounded obstinacy!" muttered Mr. Seymour, looking excessively aggrieved. "I had no idea he intended to go so far as that;—where will he stop?"

Charles Hastings laughed, and in his carelessly frank, yet unconcerned fashion, he replied, "I would advise you, my dear sir, to let him alone. He is the only sufferer, and——"

"Indeed you are greatly mistaken, Charles; Herbert is *not* the only sufferer, and you little know what might be the result of my tamely submitting to these most unusual proceedings."

Just then they reached the drawing-room, and Mr. Seymour entered it with a cloud still resting on his brow.

He gazed at his son coldly and scrutinisingly; listened anxiously to his conversation, and observed his every movement; but with all his investigation could find nothing to complain of. No gloomy shadow was visible on his manly, ingenuous countenance; he conversed with the same animation and cheerfulness as ever; his manner, calm, dignified, and agreeable, showed that he still possessed the same kindly disposition, the same frank, fearless, and gentle spirit, which had hitherto characterised him; and at last Mr. Seymour turned away, feeling relieved, doubtful, unsatisfied.

CHAPTER VI.

"As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men."

" Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, and to wait!" LONGFELLOW.

LADY CLIFFORD'S ball passed away, but Herbert Seymour was not among the guests; neither did he accompany his friends to the D—— races, which began a few days afterwards.

Much surprise was expressed at his absence, and many inquiries made as to the cause of it; but Mrs. Seymour's replies were given with such caution and ambiguity, that the real reason did not for some time transpire. Although evidently greatly annoyed at what he considered his son's perversity, Mr. Seymour, after mature deliberation, resolved to leave him—for a time at least—perfectly free, intending meanwhile to observe his conduct narrowly, and take advantage of the first symptom of weariness or disgust which he might unconsciously betray with respect to his new and singular position. Herbert was most grateful for this forbearance, and, finding himself at liberty to follow his own inclination, he pursued his way with a hopeful and undaunted spirit, turning a deaf ear to the oft-repeated remonstrances, suggestions, and solicitations of his old companions. There was no doubtful uncertainty—no hesitation or drawing back—no cowardly shrinking from ridicule: boldly he declared himself to be on the Lord's side; and, by jealously guarding his heart against the insidious encroachment of the world, he prayerfully strove to attain unto that irreproachable consistency which so distinctly marks the character of a true Christian.

Nor did he stop here. Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus,—" I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work,"—he became unceasing in his earnest endeavours to do good to the souls of others—to rescue sinners from eternal death. He felt much solicitude regarding the spiritual condition of those who dwelt on his father's estate; for, while their bodily wants were bountifully supplied, their eternal interests were totally neglected, and they seemed in imminent danger of perishing for lack of knowledge. Not that they were wholly unenlightened; but, as the little hamlet of Mertonsville (which was included in Mr. Seymour's property) was more than two miles distant from any place of worship, there were many among them whose opportunities of hearing the gospel were few and far between; and a still larger proportion, whose inclination disposed them—after their week's labour—to make the Sabbath a day of mere inaction or recreation.

Herbert lost no time in visiting these neglected ones in their own homes; and wherever he went he was received with every manifestation of delighted surprise and heartfelt satisfaction. When he first introduced the subject of religion, he was listened to respectfully, but with a look of profound astonishment and wondering incredulity;

but gradually, as the novelty of his visits wore away, and they became more at ease in his society, they began to take the deepest interest in what he said, and a spirit of serious inquiry was ere long awakened in their hearts, which led them diligently to search the Scriptures for themselves. Quietly and unostentatiously Herbert followed up this advantage. None but a very keen observer could have discovered the extent of his efforts—how patiently he persevered in his labours of love; the self-denial he daily exercised; the cheerfulness with which he often sacrificed both comfort and pleasure, time and money, for the sake of others; and the calmness with which he endured obloquy and contempt—annoyances of no trivial nature. Even his mother knew not how much he really did; for he was scrupulous in the performance of all those little duties and "courtesies of life" which he had been accustomed to fulfil; and, finding him ever ready to accompany her in her walks and drives, or relieve and assist her in entertaining her numerous guests, she never once thought of ascertaining how those hours were now spent which he had formerly devoted to his own amusement. One evening Herbert went to read and pray with an infirm old woman, called Gordon, who had been for many years nurse in Mrs. Seymour's family. On arriving at the cottage, he was amazed to find nearly thirty people assembled within, all eagerly awaiting his approach.

"Why, nurse, what is the meaning of this?" was his perplexed inquiry, as the old woman came outside the door to speak to him.

"Indeed, sir," she answered, nervously playing with her cap-strings, "I could not help it; I tried hard to dissuade them from coming, but it was of no use. I am sorry, however, that you should have the trouble of——"

"Oh, do not speak of that," returned Herbert, very gently, but with a little flush upon his brow: "I ought to be—and, I trust, am—most thankful to see so many met together for such a purpose."

He then entered the room, and, after pausing a moment for consideration, took his little Bible from his pocket, and at once commenced this his first service by reading to his attentive hearers the fifth chapter of Romans. Seeing the look of expectancy which still sat on every face when he had finished it, he proceeded to give a short exposition of the chapter, dwelling more particularly upon the inconceivable blessedness of those who, having been justified by the blood of Jesus, and reconciled to God by His death, are, notwithstanding their former guilt and depravity, accounted righteous in God's sight, and receive the gift of eternal life which that death has purchased for them. Herbert's words were evidently not without effect, and more than one heart was touched and seriously impressed by the fervent prayer which he offered up before they separated. He was himself much moved; therefore, bidding Mrs. Gordon a brief "Good night," he left her dwelling as quickly as possible, and bent his steps homeward in a very reflective mood.

From this time a similar service was regularly held every week, until at length it became difficult to find sufficient accommodation for all those who flocked to hear the young squire—as Herbert was generally called—preach. An old, but commodious barn was, after a good deal of consideration, fixed upon by some of the people as the most desirable place to be found for their purpose, and, without consulting Herbert on the subject, or even informing him of their

intentions, they proceeded themselves to improve and repair it both within and without. By their hearty exertions, the roofless, dilapidated building was, in an incredibly short space of time, converted into a suitable place of worship; but not until seats had been erected, and every arrangement completed, was Herbert made aware of their project, and invited to inspect the scarcely-to-be-recognised barn.

A tear glistened in his dark eye, as for the first time he stood within its walls, and preached to a large and attentive audience, taking for his text those memorable words which were uttered by the wise king, "But will God, in very deed, dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built!"

And while the young evangelist was almost tremblingly sowing the seed of eternal life, realizing with startling vividness a sense of his own personal responsibility, and being humbly conscious of his weakness and impotence, *God* was, by His Spirit, bringing home the Word to many a burdened one, whose life would, in after days, prove that it had not been spoken in vain.

Slowly and silently the humble worshippers dispersed at the conclusion of the service, a few only lingering for the purpose of exchanging a word or two with Herbert, from whom they were always sure of receiving a kindly greeting; and when they had spoken to him, they also proceeded to their own cottages, there to reflect upon what they had heard.

On his return home that same evening, Herbert found Mrs. Seymour—contrary to her usual habits—alone in the drawing-room. From her he learnt that his father wished them to accompany him to London—where they generally spent a few months every year—the next week. Herbert had been for some time expecting this announcement, and yet, when it came, it filled him with disappointment and regret; but, knowing that his father's wishes were imperative, he began at once to consider how he could arrange matters so as to have his place supplied, and his people watched over and cared for, during his absence.

The anticipated journey did not, however, take place at the time specified, owing to an accident which befel Mrs. Seymour—this accident consisted of a severe sprain, which, although of no very serious nature, kept her for many weeks confined to her own apartment, and obliged her to occupy the position of an invalid—a condition which she submitted to with extreme reluctance—instead of partaking of the gaities of a London season.

After awhile Mr. Seymour, who was anxious to be present at the opening of Parliament, consented to proceed alone to their town residence, leaving Herbert and Mrs. Seymour to follow him whenever the latter should feel able to undertake the journey. But, as her medical adviser considered that any fatigue or excitement would be very undesirable, he persuaded her (with some difficulty) to give up the idea of leaving home until her strength was quite recovered.

And so it came to pass that the gloom of winter was exchanged for the beauty and brightness of spring, and spring, in its turn, insensibly glided into summer, before the inhabitants of Mertonsville and its neighbourhood were called upon to part with Herbert, whose earnest labours among them rather increased than diminished, notwithstanding the many demands which Mr. Seymour naturally made upon his time.

CHAPTER VII.

CALLED TO BE SAINTS.

"True happiness hath no localities,
No tones provincial, no peculiar gait:
Where duty goes, she goes; where justice goes, she goes;
And goes with meekness, charity, and love."

TOWARDS the end of the summer the Seymours went to spend a few weeks at the fashionable watering-place of B——. While there, they were the guests of Mr. Seymour's brother-in-law, General Clare, whose wife had died many years before, leaving him one child—a daughter, on whom he lavished the tenderest and most devoted affection, and who was in his eyes all that the most fastidious father could desire—the very personification of goodness and beauty.

When at length this daughter married, and left the parental roof, General Clare felt as if he had suddenly been bereft of everything which made life dear to him; but he was destined to experience a far keener pang of anguish than any that could be occasioned by a merely temporary separation; for, after two years of wedded happiness, Mrs. Grafton was seized with a malignant fever which in a few days terminated fatally. Six months later her husband was killed by a fall from his horse; and then, rousing himself from the state of stupefaction into which intense grief had plunged him, General Clare began to take an interest in his orphaned grandson, who—as yet too young to realize the double loss he had so recently sustained—was brought to the General's house, and treated from henceforth as his acknowledged heir. Unfortunately, the training he received was not calculated to prove beneficial to a child of Reginald Grafton's peculiar disposition.

He was reckless, headstrong, and self-willed; but, with the assistance of a little wholesome discipline and occasional restraint, his character might have improved. As it was, he did not hesitate to give way to all the caprices of his humour, knowing full well that he would never be thwarted or contradicted; for his grandfather seemed, if not quite blind to his faults, to love him the better for them, and was ever ready to make allowance for his wilfulness and impetuosity.

But to return to the Seymours. Several visitors were staying at General Clare's house when they arrived there, including some of Reginald Grafton's most intimate associates; and Herbert was at once placed in an extremely trying—I had almost said perilous—position. He was often led—judging from his father's conduct—to imagine that he had his own private reasons for visiting his brother-in-law at this particular time, as in general he did not profess to entertain more than a very slight degree of attachment either for him or his young heir; now, however, between the latter and Mr. Seymour there unquestionably existed an excellent understanding, and Herbert would have been utterly powerless to resist their united

efforts to lead him astray, had he not learnt to mistrust himself, and sought strength and help from above. It would be needless to recount the many temptations which were purposely thrown in his way—the derisive words, averted looks, impatient gestures, and unkind actions which daily and hourly tried his patience and forbearance; or the numerous instances in which he discovered the truth of the words Mr. Harland had quoted, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;"—I will therefore pass over the events of the next month or two in silence.

There was one—and only one—among among Reginald Grafton's friends, who did not join the rest in turning Herbert—or, rather, Herbert's religion—into ridicule. This youth—for he was several years younger than some of his companions—possessed a warm and loving heart, and instinctively he felt that Herbert's friendship would be well worth cultivating; and though he was himself very easily drawn astray, he could not help being struck with admiration at the steady consistency of conduct which Herbert daily manifested amidst very trying circumstances.

The last Sabbath which they were to spend at B—— arrived, and the two were talking together in General Clare's library after lunch, when Reginald and several of his companions entered in search of them.

"I suppose it would be useless to ask you to give us the pleasure of your company for an hour or two, my worthy cousin?" said Reginald, with a sneer.

"I am just going to church," replied Herbert, quietly, at the same time rising and glancing at his watch.

"I told you how it would be," returned the other, looking round upon his friends, his face expressing supreme disgust. "I knew he would not be satisfied with doing what other good people——"

"Such as Reginald Grafton," slyly insinuated one of his "particular friends."

Reginald turned, and darted a furious glance at the speaker; but Herbert, ever ready to act the part of a peacemaker, stopped him from making any retort by asking quickly, "But what did you want of me, Reginald?"

"Nothing to speak of," he answered, sullenly; "I was merely going to tell you that we have made up our minds to take a sail this lovely afternoon."

"O Reginald, why not wait until to-morrow?" said Herbert, persuasively; "why are you so determined to break the Sabbath?"

"Pshaw! We have been to church once. What more would you have?"

"Besides," added another of the young men, laughing, "we have a very potent reason for wishing to take the boat out this afternoon. I dare say you are aware that old——"

"Hush!" cried Reginald Grafton, significantly. "There is no use in publishing our little secret," he continued, in a whisper. Then raising his voice, he said, addressing Herbert once more, "It is, perhaps, fortunate for us that we are not troubled with any of your foolish scruples. So, as you refuse to join us, we must e'en go without you; farewell, therefore, till dinner. Come, Stanley," (this was to the before-mentioned youth with whom Herbert had been conversing,) "we have no time to lose."

"I thought you intended to accompany me," observed Herbert, kindly.

"And so I did—and so I think I will," responded the lad, still, however, eyeing Reginald's party somewhat wistfully.

"Admirable pupil!" cried that young man, sarcastically. "He fears his master's rod, and so most unwillingly he obeys his commands."

"He reminds me of Lot's wife," remarked another, "agreeing to flee from the burning city, and yet unable to resist the temptation of casting a longing eye back upon it, as if he would fain return to it *if he only dared.*"

A chorus of laughter followed this apt illustration, and Edward Stanley stood for a minute or two in a state of woful indecision, his lip quivering with suppressed agitation, and a crimson flush overspreading his countenance. Herbert watched him with intense anxiety, and a chill fell on his heart as he saw him at length end the struggle by moving towards Reginald Grafton, saying, in as careless a tone as he could assume,—

"I am ready to go with you this instant."

"That's right, my brave fellow," responded Reginald, approvingly; "I was beginning to fear that Seymour had made a proselyte of you, and that would have been a thousand pities, you know."

"I do not think so," returned the lad, almost fiercely; for, although he had just suffered himself to be drawn away from his friend, in his inmost heart he despised himself for his cowardice: "in my opinion, it would be a good thing for us all if we were more like him."

"Well, I for one should not wish to resemble him," said Reginald, taking the lad's arm, and drawing him out of the room. "I assure you," he went on in a confidential tone, "he is not to be envied."

"What do you mean?" inquired Edward Stanley, in surprise.

"Have you never observed the expression of Mr. Seymour's face when he looks at his son?"

"I certainly have often thought him very proud and stern, but then——"

"No doubt," interrupted the other, triumphantly; "and so have I. I am not, however, at liberty to tell you all I know, Stanley, but this much I will say: if Herbert Seymour does not altogether change his conduct before six months are ended I shall be greatly surprised. You shake your head dissentingly. Well, wait awhile, and we shall see what happens."

Not another word would he say on the subject, although Stanley, who was struck with the unusual seriousness of his tone, often urged him to be more explicit.

As soon as he was left alone, Herbert Seymour took up his hat, and, with a grave, preoccupied air, set out on his solitary walk to the church. He was hastily crossing he lawn, when he suddenly found himself face to face with General Clare, who, after learning whither he was going, proposed accompanying him. Herbert gladly accepted his offer, and roused himself to listen to the General's conversation.

"By the bye, Herbert, can you tell me where the other young people are?" asked the latter, as they neared the church. "I missed them immediately after luncheon, and no one seemed to know what had become of them."

Herbert hesitated; which, when the General perceived, he said,

with a smile, instantly, however, succeeded by a shade of anxiety, "You need not fear to trust me;" adding, in a low, almost sad, tone, "I am always prepared to hear some unpleasant tidings of Reginald."

Seeing him look really in earnest, Herbert then thought it well to explain what he knew about them. His uncle appeared thoughtful for an instant, but his face brightened directly, and saying cheerfully, "They are quite safe if they have Wright with them,—and I have positively forbidden Reginald ever to venture out unaccompanied by him,"—he dismissed the subject from his mind.

Herbert found the service that afternoon peculiarly sweet and refreshing to his soul. He entered God's house with an unacknowledged feeling of disappointment, weariness, and discouragement; he left it strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, with his hopes and longings elevated, his faith increased, his love quickened, and his powers of endurance more firm and vigorous than before.

General Clare gazed at him with profound interest as they left the church together; and, drawing his arm through his own, he remarked, in a tone of unwonted sensibility, "Herbert, I have often observed you of late; but not all my penetration has enabled me to discover what it is which has transformed my favourite nephew into—I am afraid the word will shock you, but, nevertheless, it must be spoken —a saint!"

"Why should that glorious title shock me?" asked Herbert, while a bright, radiant smile lighted up his face. "I know I am very, very unworthy of the name of saint; but the height of my ambition is to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light and——" He paused abruptly, as if the rest of the sentence were too sacred to be spoken aloud.

There was an interval of silence; after which Herbert raised his eyes, and, fixing them with inquiring earnestness upon his companion, said, "You acknowledge that I am changed; may I ask you whether you really consider it is for the worse?"

"I scarcely know how I ought to answer such a question," rejoined the General, laughing. "Many would, I believe, say for the better. But," he added, suddenly becoming serious, "your father is not among their number, I fear."

"He is not, indeed," returned Herbert, in a low voice. "And yet, if he would only look upon life as it is, instead of as it seems, he would be constrained to admit the importance of seeking first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness."

"What led *you* to think on these things?" inquired the General, passing his hand contemplatively over his forehead, and heaving a voluntary sigh.

"I owe my first impression," replied Herbert, "to a sermon which I listened to on a certain Sabbath evening nearly two years ago." And then, encouraged by the General's deeply attentive manner, he proceeded to enter into some of the particulars connected with that most momentous period of his life.

General Clare evinced the liveliest interest in these particulars, and his serious questions and thoughtful remarks proved that, whatever his previous opinions may have been, he was not, like Mr. Seymour, blinded by mistaken prejudices.

When, however, Herbert had replied to his numerous questions, and endeavoured to satisfy him on every point which had hitherto

seemed doubtful, the General became, for a time, quite silent; and, on glancing covertly at him, and being struck with the gloom and dejection of his countenance, Herbert concluded that it was meant to express disapproval of his own conduct. Nothing was farther from the truth, as he himself soon discovered; for, just as they were about to enter the house, his uncle laid a detaining finger upon his arm, and, looking most kindly into his face, said hurriedly, "O Herbert! how thankful I should feel if you could only induce Reginald to follow your example! his conduct at times causes me intense anxiety."

"Then you do not blame me?" asked Herbert, in evident surprise.

"Blame you!" said the General, in a voice of indescribable pathos. "Oh, no! I almost feel it in my heart to envy you."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN PERILS IN THE SEA.

"Your look and gestures frighten me!
If evil is afloat,
I'll bear the news, whate'er they be;
So tell me on the spot."

WITH a very thankful heart, Herbert shut himself into his own room, to enjoy a brief season of quiet meditation before he should be summoned to dinner.

Never, perhaps, had his uncle's voice sounded so pleasantly in his ear as when he uttered that brief, albeit emphatic, sentence,—"I almost feel it in my heart to envy you;" and fervently did the young man pray that ere long he also might participate in those joys which afforded himself such consolation and delight.

From the General his thoughts naturally passed on to Reginald; and then, for the first time, he began to wonder whether he and his friends had yet returned. After listening intently for a few seconds, he became convinced that they had not, and, starting quickly from his seat, he rang the bell.

"Browning," said he to Mr. Seymour's valet, who presently appeared at the door, "I suppose you have heard nothing of the boating party?"

"Nothing, sir," he answered in apparent surprise. "I did not even know that the young gentlemen intended——."

"Ah!" exclaimed Herbert, a sudden suspicion crossing his mind, "Have you seen Wright lately?"

The man's surprise seemed to be increased at this question; but he merely said, "I thought you knew that Wright went off by the train last evening, sir, and is not expected home again until to-morrow."

"Are you sure?" asked Herbert, in perplexity.

"Quite sure, sir. He received a letter informing him of the dangerous illness of his sister, who resides at H——; and Mr. Reginald advised him to lose no time in going to see her."

"But how is it that my uncle was not made aware of this?" returned Herbert, gravely.

"The General was out at the time, I believe; but Mr. Reginald promised to explain everything to him as soon as he should return. Had it not been for this promise," continued the loquacious Browning, "Wright would not have gone; for he seemed at first quite puzzled to find out what particular reason the young gentleman could have for treating him with such an unusual degree of consideration. However, at length Mr. Reginald managed to satisfy him."

Herbert scarcely waited to hear the conclusion of this speech, so eager was he to go forth in quest of his heedless relative.

"Browning," he said, as he took up his hat previous to leaving the house, "if my mother should inquire for me, you will know what to tell her."

"Shall I say you are on the sands?"

"Yes. And, Browning——"

"Sir?"

"As the General is not at present aware of Wright's absence, it will perhaps be as well to say nothing about it; otherwise he might feel uneasy."

"Yes, sir; I understand," was the ready response. "But, Mr. Herbert," added the servant, in a low voice, "you do not, I hope, think they will run into any danger?"

"I trust not," replied Herbert, in the same tone; "but I confess I am beginning to wish them safe at home; for the wind is gradually rising, and——"

Browning never knew what the remainder of the sentence was; for before its completion Herbert was some distance from the house.

A few minutes sufficed to bring him through the plantations which skirted General Clare's grounds, and immediately afterwards he stood upon one of the overhanging cliffs, from whence could be obtained a very extensive view.

About a hundred feet below him lay the ocean, grand and beautiful as ever; its snowy waves now dashing with a loud, deep, rushing sound against the rocky shore, and anon receding with a gentle plaintive murmur.

The wind was, as Herbert had said, gradually rising; but in other respects there seemed nothing to justify his apprehensions: yet he was still far from satisfied, for he had seen many instances of Reginald Grafton's fiery rashness and precipitation, and, knowing that he was a most unsuitable person to have the management of a boat, he could quite understand General Clare's extreme reluctance that he should ever venture out in one, unless accompanied by his faithful attendant, Wright.

While Herbert was thus speculating on the cause of their delay, and anxiously, but vainly, trying with the aid of his pocket-telescope to see some sign of the missing boat, he descried a seaman-like man on the sands, and, rapidly descending by a steep rugged path, he was soon at his side.

"It will be a stormy night, I'm thinking, sir," said the man, doffing his cap respectfully, when he saw him; for Herbert was well known to the sailors, as he had on several occasions found opportunities of usefulness among them.

"Do you think so, my friend?" he exclaimed uneasily.

"Look there, sir,"—and the stranger pointed to the sky, which had suddenly grown black and threatening,—"in half an hour the waves will be——"

"Have you seen anything of General Clare's boat?" asked Herbert, interrupting him in considerable alarm.

"General Clare's boat," repeated the other, fixing his earnest gaze upon a distant sail, which his more experienced eye had just discovered crossing round a projecting rock; "is not that it?"

"Thank God!" aspirated Herbert, heaving a sigh of intense satisfaction, as he watched the tiny vessel gliding swiftly towards them, "they are safe!"

His companion said nothing. With Herbert's telescope he continued narrowly to observe the boat's approach.

"They seem wonderfully merry," he muttered to himself at length; and at the same moment the sounds of loud laughter, intermingled

with snatches of foolish songs, were wafted to Herbert's ear, making his face glow with a mixture of shame and sorrow.

"I greatly fear," remarked the sailor in the same unconscious manner, "that the young gentlemen have been drinking."

"Oh, surely not!" cried Herbert, almost inclined to resent such an insinuation.

"I beg your pardon, sir," returned the man, looking rather confused; "I am sometimes in the habit of speaking my thoughts aloud; but, indeed, it is well known that, whenever Mr. Grafton and his friends go out in the boat, they take a supply of wine with them; and from the appearance of things to-day, I suspect they have had more than usual."

He spoke civilly, but decidedly; and Herbert, fearing that what he said was only too probable, thought it advisable to change the subject.

The boat, meanwhile, was every moment drawing nearer and nearer, while the wind growled angrily, and the scudding clouds grew darker and denser, until both sea and shore seemed enveloped in gloom, and a few large drops of rain warned Herbert and his companion that the storm was fast approaching.

"Fools!" muttered the latter between his teeth; "have you no eyes?" Then, raising his stentorian voice, he shouted to them to take down the sail.

Again and again he repeated his words, but all to no purpose.

The Sabbath-breakers paused for an instant, and appeared, by their gestures, to understand his warning; but, without paying the least attention to his instructions, they began to laugh and sing as before.

Scarcely a minute elapsed, and Herbert, who was watching them with the keenest anxiety depicted on his countenance, saw Reginald Grafton rise from his seat, and totter over to the other side of the boat, apparently with the intention of enforcing some joke he had just uttered. Ere he could regain his seat, a furious gust of wind swept over land and sea. The frail boat was instantly capsized, and Reginald and his companions, with one wild, despairing cry, sank into the pitiless waves.

Quick as thought Herbert disembarrassed himself of some of his clothing, and, deaf to the remonstrances of those around him,—for by this time quite a crowd had collected on the beach,—with a prayer in his heart, he plunged into the sea.

"O Mr. Herbert! for God's sake, come back!" shouted Browning, who just then approached the scene of action, having been despatched by Mrs. Seymour to gain some intelligence of her son. "Men!" he added, turning fiercely to the bystanders, "how could you suffer him to go out in such a sea as this? He will never be able to swim so far; and to think that *his* life should be sacrificed. Oh, it is too bad!"

"We did our best to prevent him from making the attempt," said Herbert's late companion. "But he would not listen to our words. He is a brave fellow!"

"He is, he is!" was the general response; and then every eye was again directed seaward, and every tongue hushed in the breathless silence of expectancy.

Browning did not wait to see the result. With a heavy heart he

turned, and rapidly reascended the cliff; then, hurrying onward, without once pausing to take breath, he chose the shortest path through the before-mentioned plantations, sprang hastily across the lawn and into the house, and from thence proceeded to the dining-room, where General Clare and Mr. Seymour were sitting over their wines, the ladies having left the table a few minutes previously.

"O sir—the boat," he gasped.

Both gentlemen sprang up in alarm, and an expression of the deepest anguish appeared on the General's countenance.

"What is it Browning? Tell us quickly," said Mr. Seymour, advancing towards him, and speaking in his usual tone of firmness and decision. "Or, stay—drink this first," he added, pouring out a glass of wine, when he perceived that the man was really incapable of further speech. "Now, rouse yourself, and be brief and collected. What has happened to the boat?"

"It has been overturned, sir, and——" He hesitated.

"Go on," said his master, authoritatively.

Thus commanded, he continued gravely, "The young gentlemen are all in the water!"

A groan burst from the General's lips. "All?" he repeated huskily.

"Yes, sir; but just as I left the sands, they were preparing to send a boat in search of them, and I trust they will all be brought home safely. I hurried back as quickly as possible, in order to assist in getting things ready for them."

Though, with the view of alleviating General Clare's sorrow, he spoke thus hopefully, his looks belied his words, especially when adding, "*Mr. Herbert*——"

"Well! what of him?" asked Mr. Seymour, impatiently. "I presume *he* was not among them."

"No; but he discovered, on his return from church this afternoon, that Mr. Reginald and his friends had gone off without Wright; and, becoming alarmed at their absence, he went to look for them. While on the sands, he observed the accident, and immediately jumped into the sea, hoping to reach some of them by swimming."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Seymour. "Then he is in danger also!"

Not another word did he utter, except to issue a few concise orders to the servants — which orders, notwithstanding their brevity, included everything that was necessary to be attended to from the least to the greatest; and then, taking a supply of brandy and other restoratives with him, he strode forth silent and stern—preceded by a man carrying some warm blankets on his arm, accompanied by the General, and followed by Browning, whose anxiety would not permit him to remain longer in the house.

CHAPTER IX.

DANGER, DELIVERANCE, AND DEATH.

"But hark! a gratulating voice,
With which the very hills rejoice;
'Tis from the crowd, who, tremblingly,
Had watched the event, and now can see
That he is safe at last." WORDSWORTH.

WELL was it for Reginald Grafton that Herbert had so promptly acted up to his own generous impulses, instead of listening to the cautious admonitions and suggestions of others; for neither himself nor Edward Stanley could swim a stroke, and they must both have perished had it not been for his timely aid.

Reginald's situation was even more dangerous than that of Edward Stanley, as the latter was clinging with frantic eagerness to the side of the boat, while Reginald had been thrown a considerable distance farther off. To reach *him*, therefore, was Herbert's first endeavour; and bravely he fought his way through the rising waves, and perseveringly toiled on against wind and tide, until, at last, he came upon the object of his search; and, by making one great—almost superhuman—effort, caught him just as he was sinking for the third time.

A low murmur of applause ran through the crowd of spectators as they witnessed this successful attempt, and many anxious, impatient glances were directed toward the boat (which, after much and apparently unnecessary delay, was about to be launched), while sundry conjectures were formed regarding the probable time it would take to reach the sufferers, and fears expressed lest Herbert's strength should fail him before its arrival.

These fears were not causeless; for, if the going out had been attended with difficulty and danger, how much more so was the returning! when, in addition to the other disadvantages under which he laboured, Herbert was burdened with the half-unconscious Reginald, who weighed him down, and in many ways unintentionally retarded his progress.

Yet still he struggled on, struggled and struggled with unabated energy, though he was evidently becoming greatly exhausted. When they were within a few yards of the shore, a rope was thrown to them, and of this Herbert gladly availed himself.

He was welcomed with a burst of enthusiasm, and one after another flocked around him, proud to testify their admiration of his manly conduct; but he could not consider his work finished so long as Edward Stanley was in any danger. Without, therefore, delaying a moment longer than was absolutely necessary, he delivered Reginald over to their care, and hastened to commit himself once more to the deep.

"Are you mad, sir?" cried a man, who, having divined his purpose intercepted him as he was about to spring into the sea. "Don't yo

know that you are quite worn out already?" he continued, receiving no answer to this question.

"I can return in the boat," said Herbert, hurriedly. "But I must go to that poor lad, or he will not be able to hold on till it reaches him. You see they have gone round by the other side, and it may be some time before he is discovered."

The man shook his head, and still tried to dissuade him from venturing out again; but Herbert neither saw him nor heard him, for he was already off.

His strokes were not now strong and vigorous, for a sense of lassitude and weakness was stealing over him, and he began to despair of reaching his young friend at all. But the sight of the lad's helplessness and danger would come vividly before him, and prove irresistible in leading him to make fresh exertions on his behalf.

Several times Herbert had shouted to him to maintain his hold of the boat until he should arrive to assist him, and gallantly did the poor boy endeavour to carry out his injunctions; but at last he could hold on no longer; his overstrained powers gave way, and he disappeared like a stone in the mighty waters.

Herbert inwardly groaned at this sudden confirmation of his worst apprehensions; but rallying his fast-failing energies, he seemed to gather courage as he proceeded, and redoubled his efforts, apparently quite unmindful of his own physical weakness and exhaustion.

Presently he reached the overturned boat, which was now nearly covered, but no traces of Edward Stanley could he find. Vainly he dived under the water, and, by so doing, placed himself in imminent danger. Vainly he raised his head, and gazed eagerly and anxiously around him—supporting himself meanwhile by grasping with one hand the keel of the boat. All in vain!

Every effort fruitless, every hope defeated! Labour, and pain, and toil—all, all in vain!

Thus thought Herbert, when he found that his exertions were unavailing; and bitterly he lamented his unfortunate friend's melancholy fate; for now he scarcely dared to indulge even the shadow of hope that he might possibly be spared. A minute elapsed,—not more,—though to him it seemed ages; and Herbert continued, as if fascinated, steadfastly to gaze upon the spot from whence Edward Stanley had vanished; when all at once, as suddenly as it had disappeared, his inanimate form rose to the surface of the water. Herbert seized it in a vice-like grasp, and then he began afresh to battle with the waves.

He knew that it would be sheer madness for him to attempt to swim with his burden to the shore; all he could, therefore, do, was to await the approach of the boat which was drawing near them, after having been instrumental in saving two of Reginald's companions, whom the violence of the wind had carried to a considerable distance.

Two others had gained the shore, partly by swimming, and partly by the assistance of ropes; while a fifth—alas! that it should be my painful duty to record the fact!—had been summoned to appear, with the sin of Sabbath-breaking still fresh upon his conscience, in the presence of that God who has promised to "render to every man according to his deeds," whether good or bad. His body was not discovered until it was dashed in on the rocks several days afterward, dreadfully disfigured, and almost unrecognisable.

It was then borne to General Clare's house, from whence, after it had been laid in a magnificent coffin, it was solemnly conveyed to London, and, amid pomp and grandeur and ceremony, consigned to the tomb.

Many mourned over his untimely end.

Loving relations wept as they recalled his image.

His late associates spoke of his geniality and light-heartedness, his wit and humour, his freedom from pride, arrogance, or self-conceit. His faults were never alluded to; or, if mentioned, only to be metamorphosed into positive excellences. Thus his very failings were quoted as proofs of a noble and generous nature, and his vices transformed into virtues. His thorough contempt of goodness, and beauty, and truth; the life of dissipation he had for some time led; the flagrant violations of God's laws he had unblushingly committed, all these were, and perhaps wisely, forgotten; for death, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, and with its mysterious finger effectually closes the door upon censure, humiliation, and strife, converting harshness into pity and foes into friends.

O ye young men, whose hopes and desires are ever hovering around the same narrow and contracted circle of earth and earthliness —whose thoughts never rise above this poor fleeting world—who strive—though often vainly—to escape from the checks of conscience by plunging deeper and yet deeper into the mire of sin,—why, oh! why do you thus choose to drink of the shallow, polluted stream, instead of that deeper, purer, clearer fountain, from whence issues the unmingled, soul-satisfying *aqua vitæ*—the true water of life?

What will it profit you, though after your death friends should weep over you, and speak of you in glowing terms of love and affection? What will it profit you, though a costly monument should be erected to your memory, with your name and rank and the date inscribed on it, together with the record of a thousand virtues which you may have been supposed to possess, and a thousand gallant actions you may perchance have performed? You answer, *Nothing:* and God, and the Bible, and angels in heaven, and lost spirits in hell, re-echo the word; "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap—he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

* * * * * *

Right willingly the sailors plied their oars; but, in spite of their zeal and activity, they only reached Herbert just in time.

Another moment, and he and his precious burden must have gone down together; for, although he felt himself growing weaker and weaker, he would not, even to ensure his own safety, relinquish his hold of Edward Stanley.

The last effort which was required of him he performed with the greatest difficulty; and then, worn out, pale, and trembling exceedingly, he sank down in the boat, in a state of unconsciousness—his whole appearance denoting how painfully he had overtasked his strength.

When he recovered consciousness, he found himself lying on a rude bed in a fisherman's hut. A strange doctor, whom he had never before seen, was bending over him, while at a little distance stood Mr. Seymour, exchanging a few whispered words with his valet. A low exclamation of satisfaction, which involuntarily escaped from the

doctor's lips, when Herbert first opened his eyes and gazed wonderingly around him, attracted their attention once more to the bed, which they cautiously approached.

"I can give you hope now, sir," said the surgeon, turning to Mr. Seymour, and speaking in a tone of heartfelt felicitation.

A look of relief passed over that gentleman's countenance, and a soft though fleeting smile played on his lips; he, however, merely made a gesture of acknowledgment to the experienced surgeon, who had, with the assistance of several others, been for a considerable length of time occupied in employing the usual means towards Herbert's recovery apparently without the least chance of success; but uttered no words.

Presently, after having for a few seconds silently regarded the still pale and prostrate form of his son, he inquired in a low voice, "When will it be safe for us to have him conveyed to General Clare's house?"

The doctor shook his head very doubtfully. "I cannot yet speak with certainty. Perhaps to-morrow evening; assuredly not before," he added, on perceiving the somewhat contemptuous glance which Mr. Seymour undesignedly threw around the small and meanly furnished room. "It is quite possible that he may even then be unfit for removal. And as there is now no cause for alarm, I should advise you to leave him for the night; rest and quiet is all he at present requires, and your servant can remain to render any little service which may be necessary."

"But his mother?" said Mr. Seymour, interrogatively, after assenting to this plan, the wisdom of which he at once perceived.

"Oh, I had forgotten my promise to the lady. Is she still in the outer room?"

"She is, sir," replied Browning, to whom the question was addressed.

"Then will you beg her—but no, I will speak to her myself." And the doctor left the bedroom, reappearing the next instant with Mrs. Seymour, who shortly after the departure of her husband and General Clare, had received a vague account of the accident; and, filled with the liveliest solicitude, had followed them to the sands. Most fortunately she was spared the pain of witnessing Herbert's struggles in the water, he having been, before her arrival, carried into the nearest cottage; but perhaps her agony was scarcely less when she beheld him lying white and ghastly upon the fisherman's humble pallet, with blood trickling from his nostrils, and no sign of vitality visible.

Only one look was permitted her; for the doctor, who had been hastily summoned from his attendance on Reginald Grafton, entered the cottage immediately after herself; and his first movement was to dismiss her from the room, with the promise that he would send for her ere long.

And yet hours passed away before that promise was fulfilled, and the poor lady grew sick at heart as she watched and waited in vain for any satisfactory intelligence of her beloved son. Occasionally Mr. Seymour would come and try to encourage and console her, but she could easily see by his manner that he had very little hope himself; and when at length the men who had been engaged in rendering active assistance to the doctor were sent away, she began to fear

that the unbroken silence which reigned in that small inner chamber after their departure must be the silence of death.

How great, then, was her joy on learning from Browning—who hastened to her directly he heard the cheering words which had been addressed to his master—that there was hope! A terrible load seemed instantly to be lifted from her heart; and, finding herself relieved from the oppressive weight of apprehension and grief—almost despair—which was fast gathering around her, she bowed her head upon her hands, and gave way to a flood of grateful, refreshing tears.

In this condition the doctor found her; but immediately divining the purpose for which he had come, she rose, and, with restored calmness, accompanied him to the bedside of her son.

CHAPTER X.

IMPRESSIONS.

"Do Thou direct our steps aright;
Help us Thy name to fear;
O give us grace to watch and pray,
And strength to persevere."

Pratt's Collection.

MRS. SEYMOUR was not allowed to remain with her son more than a few moments; and during that short time her movements were vigilantly observed by the doctor, who had previously cautioned her against betraying any emotion when in Herbert's presence, as the least excitement or agitation would, he said, prove hurtful, if not really dangerous, to him in his present state of weakness and exhaustion. But she had the unspeakable happiness of seeing him once more restored to consciousness; and though, when he essayed to speak, the words died away in an inarticulate whisper, yet she knew that he recognised her by the smile which passed over his features, as she leant forward and imprinted a mother's kiss upon his brow.

After he was left alone with Browning, about an hour later—the doctor having gone to pay a brief visit to another of the young men who required his assistance—Herbert suddenly awoke from an uneasy slumber, and, starting up, he glanced round the room with a strange, confused, terrified expression, such as caused his faithful attendant considerable uneasiness. His—Browning's—first impulse, was to set off in search of the doctor, his next and wisest, to administer a soothing draught, which the latter had left with him to be used in case of need.

Before he could offer it to him, however, a change came over Herbert's appearance; he gave one long weary sigh, and then sank back on his pillow from excess of weakness.

A minute or two he remained thus, perfectly motionless, after which he again unclosed his eyes, and, fixing them earnestly and intently upon Browning, uttered in a faint voice the words—"Stanley —Reginald?" The man did not at first comprehend his meaning, but when the question was repeated with increased earnestness, it occurred to him that Herbert might possibly be feeling anxiety regarding the fate of the two he had so nobly undertaken to rescue from the waves; he therefore hastened to assure him that they were both quite safe, which was indeed strictly true, as, though Edward Stanley's case was far more serious than that of Reginald Grafton, who was very soon restored to animation, neither of them had suffered to the same extent as Herbert.

"And the others?" asked the latter; a flush of pleasure rising to his pale cheeks at this cheering intelligence.

"They are going on very well," replied Browning, promptly; purposely ignoring the fact of there being one of them yet undiscovered; for, under the circumstances, he felt no hesitation in leading Herbert

to infer that all were saved. Not wishing, however, to be further questioned, he continued, in a tone of respectful expostulation,—"But, indeed, sir, you must not talk any more; the doctor charged me to keep you quiet, and especially warned me against agitating you by referring to this painful occurrence. Sleep, he says, is what you at present most require."

Herbert smiled. "I am quite willing to sleep, my good Browning," he said gently, and then, without further words, he reclosed his eyes, and was soon in a state of profound repose.

He awoke the next morning greatly refreshed; but was not permitted to leave the fisherman's cottage until the succeeding day, on the evening of which he returned to General Clare's house.

The latter's first interview with Herbert was deeply affecting. Again and again he expressed his grateful appreciation of the inexpressibly important service he had rendered him by saving the life of his unworthy, though much beloved, grandson, whose disobedient and deceitful conduct shocked and pained him excessively.

Reginald had also himself the grace to acknowledge that he was deeply indebted to Herbert for the help he had so seasonably afforded him. He shuddered to think what would have been his condition without that help; for he had stood for a little moment upon the threshold of eternity, realizing, almost for the first time in his life, the existence of another mysterious world,—so far removed, and yet so closely connected with this; a world of which he had rarely if ever thought, and which he was so utterly unprepared to enter; and this fact, combined with the distressing circumstance of one of his late companions having been suddenly taken, while he was mercifully spared, left some startling impressions upon his mind; impressions, however, which were, with time's assistance, entirely obliterated—buried wilfully and completely in the depths of oblivion!

In Edward Stanley's case, these influences proved more conclusive. Not only did he experience a solemn awe, a terrible dread, and a fearful shrinking from death when it approached him; not only did he tremble at the thought of being ushered into the presence of the Great Eternal, whom he had feared without loving, and known only by the hearing of the ear; but his own particular sins and transgressions rose up before him with appalling distinctness: one by one they flashed like lightning across his memory,—privileges abused—duties neglected—warnings disregarded—Sabbaths desecrated—the Bible unopened—the throne of grace unappreciated and unapproached—overtures of mercy despised and rejected—precepts, promises, and threatenings, all in their turn slighted and contemned,—until the magnitude and aggravation of his guilt seemed to outweigh every other consideration, and he felt in his inmost heart that, however severe his punishment might be, it could not be greater than he deserved.

His impressions, therefore, being deeper and more intensified than those of Reginald Grafton, proved also more abiding. Not that at this time he spoke of his feelings to any one; on the contrary, he carefully avoided the subject, and was silent, and even reserved, whenever it was remotely alluded to; but after his remarkable deliverance from the jaws of death, his manner became serious and reflective, and this of itself was sufficient to indicate the nature of the change which was gradually going on within.

Had not their visit to General Clare been, at the time of the acci-

dent, nearly over, Stanley might have been more communicative to Herbert; for whom, in addition to the respect he had previously felt, he now entertained the warmest and most grateful affection, well-nigh amounting to reverence. But it so happened, that during the week or two which elapsed before they finally separated, the lad had not many opportunities of seeing him alone, as Mrs. Seymour was so concerned about his health that she could scarcely be persuaded to leave him for a single moment; and Herbert, having no suspicion of the state of his friend's mind, did not make the same effort to gain his confidence as he would otherwise have done.

They parted with equal cordiality and unfeigned regret on both sides—but no! I mistake—the regret was *not* equal; for Edward Stanley felt that, in leaving Herbert, he would be deprived of his best friend. He longed to explain to him the doubts, misgivings, and fears which agitated and distracted him, the difficulties and hindrances which seemed to encompass him at every step, and the load of guilt which pressed so heavily upon his conscience—longed to ask his counsel, and seek his assistance; and yet shrank so unaccountably from doing so, that almost without wishing it, he succeeded in restraining every outward manifestation of the many conflicting emotions by which he was thus grievously and perpetually exercised.

The people of Mertonsville received Herbert with exceeding joy, when at length he returned to them; and although expressed in a different manner, *his* satisfaction at being once more able to go in and out among them was as great as their own.

Mr. Seymour's heart seemed to have been in some measure softened by the unforeseen event which had threatened to deprive him of his only son, and, disguise the fact as he would, it could not be denied that he was secretly proud of the part Herbert had taken on the occasion; and this, no doubt, influenced him for awhile, and accounted for his refraining from interfering with any of the young man's plans until the recollection of the past should have become fainter, feebler, and less affecting to his mind.

Without loss of time, therefore, Herbert resumed his former habits; and a very sweet and profitable season followed—a season productive of pleasure and benefit to many.

But, even in the midst of this prosperity, he was not, of course, free from temptation; for my readers will have already perceived that his position rendered him peculiarly liable to misconstruction, on the one hand; while, on the other, he had to fight against the enticements of those with whom he had been wont to associate on terms of the closest intimacy; combat the plausible arguments with which they endeavoured to overcome his scruples, and maintain a strict watch over his own looks, and words, and actions, lest he should by any means betray an unchristian or uncharitable disposition, and be led into those inconsistencies of conduct which are so incompatible with the pure religion of Jesus, but which (softly be it spoken) are too often glaringly manifested in the characters of those who profess to be "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," to have "crucified the flesh, with its affections and lusts," and to be "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

Herbert felt it as an especial trial, when, as was frequently the case, he considered it his duty to run the risk of annoying his parents by declining to accompany them to the fashionable entertainments

of their pleasure-loving neighbours, as well as to other more public places of amusement.

It grieved him excessively; and yet what could he do? He dared not enter into compromise with the world—dared not *unnecessarily* put himself into danger.

In his anxiety, however, to give his father no just cause of complaint, he regularly appeared at Mrs. Seymour's (comparatively) quiet parties; and, though he avoided both cards and dancing, no one could affirm that he was either dull or gloomy, or even less cheerful than others.

On one of these occasions he was standing talking to Sir George Hastings—the father of his friend Charles—when Mrs. Seymour glided up to him, wearing an expression of care upon her brow.

"Herbert," she said in a soft whisper, "every one is wondering why you do not dance."

"But that need not trouble you, mother mine," he answered gently —"it is nothing new, you know."

"There is Lady Emma Clifford," she went on hurriedly; "your father is most anxious for you to ask her to dance; so few gentlemen are here to-night;" and she hesitated. "In short, could you not——" Again she paused, and looked beseechingly into his face.

"I understand you," said Herbert, meditatively; "but it appears to me, that Lady Emma has had no lack of partners."

"Oh, I am aware of that; but if *you* neglect her——"

"Well, I will see what I can do to amuse her," returned Herbert, with a smile, which puzzled Mrs. Seymour: "this dance seems to be nearly over. Directly she is at liberty I will speak to her."

And, moving towards the arch, which separated the drawing-room from the one the dancers were in, he waited until Lady Emma Clifford appeared at its opening, and then his mother, who was watching him with a good deal of curiosity, not unmingled with surprise, saw him approach her, apparently with the intention of engaging her hand for the next dance.

The young lady smilingly assented to his proposal, and taking his offered arm, returned with him into the room she had just left.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. SEYMOUR'S PROJECT.

"The mind was formed to mount sublime,
Beyond the narrow bounds of time,
To everlasting things:
But earthly vapours cloud the sight,
And hang with cold, oppressive weight
Upon her drooping wings." STEELE.

OTHER eyes besides Mrs. Seymour's watched Herbert as he passed through the brilliantly lighted room with Lady Emma Clifford leaning on his arm, and several low-toned comments were made and expressive looks exchanged, which would have surprised him not a little had he been conscious of them. But his observers soon found that their conclusions had been too hastily formed; for, after leisurely traversing the whole length of the apartment, he entered a small though elegantly furnished ante-room, in which were displayed many rare and costly objects of virtu, and having placed his fair companion upon a chair composed of elaborately carved ebony, which he had drawn close to an antique mosaic table, he opened a richly inlaid marqueterie cabinet, and began to select from his large and varied collection such curiosities as he thought most likely to interest her; and, if the expression of her countenance could be taken as proof positive of her real sentiments, she was in nowise dissatisfied with this, to her, novel kind of amusement.

When given to understand that Herbert was dancing, Mr. Seymour felt considerably elated; his disappointment, therefore, was proportionately great on discovering that the information he had received was incorrect. He stood for a moment near enough to observe them both, and then with a bitter smile turned away and approached Lady Clifford, who had been his late partner at the whist-table.

"I was just going in search of my daughter," she remarked pleasantly; "but I see she is with Mr. Herbert."

"So I also perceive," answered the gentleman, his usually cold features assuming a still colder aspect.

"They seem to be very agreeably employed; shall we join them?"

Mr. Seymour bit his lip, and retreated a step or two; but quickly recovering his composure, and that dignified courtesy for which as an host he was generally distinguished, he replied with the utmost politeness, "As your ladyship pleases."

"How extremely gratifying it must be for you to have such an excellent son!" pursued the lady in her blandest tones.

"Doubtless!" said Mr. Seymour, sarcastically.

"So steady and consistent in all he he does!" she continued: "quite a contrast to most of the young men one knows. I hear that he does not even dance; but, of course," (this was added in a tone of sympathy,) "*that* will not last."

"I trust not," returned Mr. Seymour, bitterly.

"Oh, no!" was the confident rejoinder, "these fancies never continue long. I had an instance of this a few days ago—but here we are. My dear Emma," she said playfully, addressing her daughter, "have you forgotten that you are engaged to Mr. Hastings for the next quadrille?"

The young lady rose with a smile, and just then Charles Hastings, coming forward, exclaimed, "I am here to remind you of your promise, Lady Emma: may I still hope you will keep it?"

"Certainly," she replied, in surprise. "Why should I not?"

The young man laughed, and glanced archly at Herbert; but when he spoke again, it was in too low a tone for any one, save Lady Emma, to hear.

As the two went off together, Lady Clifford turned to Herbert, saying complacently, "If she had merely consulted her inclination, she would have remained here; for she is, I assure you, by no means fond of dancing."

"Indeed!" returned Herbert, with a doubtful smile—so slight as to be scarcely perceptible upon his lips—while Mr. Seymour's face expressed blank amazement.

"What a lovely gem!" cried her ladyship, presently taking up and examining attentively a beautifully executed cameo which was framed in massive gold, ornamented with antique chasings. "Few amateurs, I suspect," she added, looking admiringly around her upon the many and various curious objects which were visible in every direction, "have succeeded in making such a costly and unique collection as yours appears to be. Really, I must ask you, my dear Mr. Herbert, to undertake the task of cicerone. I am quite longing to hear the history of some of these beautiful things!"

"What shall I begin with?" inquired Herbert, feeling rather amused at her sudden enthusiasm.

"Oh! anything—this exquisitely wrought silver cup, for instance."

"We are indebted to the celebrated Florentine, Benvenuto Cellini, for it," returned the young man, putting it into her hand, "as well as for these coins, which were all executed by him. This portrait also is worthy of your notice, being, I believe, the only one of the kind now to be found; it was presented to my father by the late Duke of C——."

Thus far Mr. Seymour had remained with them, taking no part in the conversation, but allowing neither a word nor look to escape his notice: now, however, with a brief sentence of apology, he withdrew, leaving Herbert and Lady Clifford alone altogether.

"A clever woman of the world," he murmured with a grim smile, as he returned to his other guests. "I was nonplussed at first, but now that I understand her object, I will do all I can to further it."

As he said this, his eye sought out Lady Emma, who was gracefully floating through the mazes of an intricate dance with Charles Hastings, and while he gazed his stern brow relaxed, and a smile, such as his face had rarely worn of late, appeared on his lips. "Yes, that will do!" he exclaimed, half aloud, with the air of one who has just solved a difficult problem; "let him be once persuaded to marry her, and we shall hear nothing more of his religious scruples."

This scheme, which he had so hastily, and, as he himself thought, so happily hit upon, for restoring Herbert to his former habits and pursuits, occupied Mr. Seymour's mind both night and day for many

successive weeks, and he did not confine himself to mere thinking; for, having ascertained that Lady Clifford's sentiments coincided with his own, he began, like a skilful general, to consider how he could most effectually lay siege to Herbert's heart.

He knew that in order to succeed he must act with judgment, discretion, and tact; and accordingly he commenced his operations in a very cautious and unsuspicious manner; and, while making no secret of his own preference for Lady Emma, he carefully concealed from Herbert his real reason for throwing him so constantly into her society.

For a time, therefore, the latter was happily unconscious of the intentions of his father regarding him, though he did occasionally remark, with some surprise, that Lady Emma's name was perpetually on his lips, and that her charms were depicted, her accomplishments enumerated, and her real or fancied virtues extolled with uncommon and uncalled-for frequency and warmth.

But his eyes were opened at last, and it happened in this wise.

He was going to the village to preach one evening, when, on turning a corner of the road, he nearly ran against some one who was walking in the opposite direction. As he stopped to apologise for his undesigned incivility, he was greeted with a hearty and good-humoured laugh.

"Ah, Charles! is that you?" cried Herbert, recognising the voice, though it was almost too dark for him to observe his features.

"Well, if you had asked me that question half an hour ago, I should have answered in the affirmative," replied the young man, still laughing; "but you have given my nerves such a shock that I could not positively swear to my own identity at the present moment."

"Were you on your way to the Park?"

"Yes, I wanted to speak to you about our riding party to-morrow."

"I am sorry I cannot offer to return with you," said Herbert, frankly; "but the fact is, I have an appointment at eight, for which, I fear, I am already late."

"I thought you seemed in a desperate hurry," observed Mr. Hastings, moving round and passing his arm within that of his friend. "I suppose, however, there can be no objection to my accompanying you part of the way?"

"Will you not rather proceed to the house?"

"For what purpose?" said the young man, lightly. "My object was to see you, and it is already attained."

"But there are others who would gladly welcome you," returned Herbert, with a smile; "for several of my father's friends have been dining with him, and you well know how delighted he is on such occasions to have the assistance of one who is, like you, gifted with an inexhaustible fund of ready wit."

"So you can be sarcastic, I perceive, Herbert."

"Not so, my friend; I was merely repeating words which I have heard addressed to you a hundred times."

Charles Hastings shrugged his shoulders.

"And who may these friends be?" he asked irreverently. "None, I presume, that I should care to meet."

"I am not so sure of that. There is young Mr. Hilton and his father, Sir William Crossley, Algernon Ramsey, and John Wilmot. Then the ladies——"

"Oh, I scarcely thought of them!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings, quickly. "Tell me their names, my dear fellow."

With a smile at his impatience, Herbert complied; and when he had finished the list by mentioning Lady Clifford and her daughter, his companion said bluntly, "Why did you leave them, Herbert?"

"I thought I explained to you," he answered in surprise, "that I have an appointment which I am anxious to keep."

"But will not Lady Emma be very indignant when she discovers your absence?"

"Lady Emma indignant!" cried Herbert, "I do not comprehend you. There are others far more capable of amusing her than myself, if that is your meaning."

"You certainly speak coolly, Herbert! Now, I should have imagined that, under existing circumstances, it would be more natural for you to wish to entertain her (in your own house too) yourself, instead of entrusting her to the care of others."

"My dear Charles, what are you talking about?" inquired Herbert, feeling, it must be confessed, a little impatient. "Do you suppose I take any particular interest in Lady Emma, or is it merely for your amusement that you are talking thus?"

"Do you mean, then, to deny your own engagement?" said Mr. Hastings, in a tone between jest and earnest; "for I assure you it seems to be well known to others."

"What is well known?" returned Herbert, more and more puzzled.

"Why," replied the other, with a constrained laugh, "have I not yet made myself intelligible? It is generally supposed that you and Lady Emma are engaged to be married."

"I am grieved to hear it," said Herbert, after a moment's hesitation. "I only hope the absurd report will not reach the young lady's ears; for it would, doubtless, affect her even more painfully than it does me."

"Then am I to understand that there is no truth in the assertion?" asked his companion, presently.

"None whatever!" was the reply, given with startling emphasis.

Charles Hastings whistled softly, and walked for a few steps in silence. At length he spoke again. "How is it, then, that Mr. Seymour encourages the idea, and always appears so satisfied when he sees you together? and how is it that Lady Clifford constantly advises her daughter to give up dancing? and how is it that the young lady herself——"

"Stop, Charles! I beg you will say no more," interrupted Herbert, greatly distressed; you are, you must be, altogether mistaken. Surely my father would not, could not, act so cruelly; and yet——" He suddenly stopped; for there rushed into his mind a thousand reasons for concluding that it was all too true; and the displeased brow and firm-set lips would have shown Charles Hastings, had he been able to read his countenance, how seriously he was annoyed.

"I could not possibly have foreseen this," he continued, as if forgetful of the presence of his friend; "nor do I understand how any one could have so grievously misunderstood me."

After a little consideration he turned to Mr. Hastings, and added in a voice which was no longer stern or troubled, "I am thankful that you have at last opened my eyes, Charles; and for the future I shall be on my guard."

"I was just regretting having interfered in the matter at all," rejoined the young man, gently; "it has only vexed and disturbed you; and well it may," he went on, speaking with indignation and generous warmth. "I can scarcely believe that Mr. Seymour could so mercilessly and deliberately——"

"Hush, my dear Charles," said Herbert, striving to check his angry protest; "you must not abuse my father. Remember how much I have done to annoy him; what a keen disappointment it is to him to find that my tastes and pursuits are so opposed to his own, and then you will not, I am sure, judge him harshly."

"If *you* begin to take his part, I have nothing more to say."

"This is where I am expected," said Herbert, as he stopped the next instant at the door of the somewhile barn; "so I must now bid you good-night. We shall, I hope, meet again to-morrow."

But to his surprise Mr. Hastings seemed in no hurry to leave him. He glanced at the windows, from which streamed a cheerful and brilliant light; then he turned his eyes toward the door which Herbert was about to open; and finally, with a good deal of hesitation, he said, laying his hand upon his friend's arm, "Herbert, I should like to go in with you."

"You!" exclaimed the young man, in accents of surprise. "Are you serious?"

"Perfectly. Would you greatly object to my doing so?"

"Object! No!" returned Herbert, warmly. "But," he added, gravely and significantly, "before permitting you to enter, I must warn you that if you expect to have your curiosity gratified, or your ear pleased by listening to 'the enticing words of man's wisdom,' you will meet with nothing but disappointment: let me therefore advise you to consider for an instant ere you——"

"I *have* considered," was the hasty and somewhat impatient reply.

"So be it then," said Herbert; and, with a smile, he opened the door, and entered the building, closely followed by his friend.

CHAPTER XII.

PLEASURE AND PAIN.

"The honest heart, that's free frae a'
Intended fraud or guile,
However fortune kick the ba',
Has aye some cause to smile." BURNS.

AFTER seeing that Mr. Hastings was suitably accommodated with a seat, Herbert approached a small raised platform at the upper end of the room, and took up his own position behind an oaken table, which was neatly covered with crimson cloth. While he thoughtfully turned over the pages of his hymn-book, before commencing the service, his late companion, inspired by the novelty of his position, with a lively feeling of curiosity, stole a brief glance around him, and was astonished at the number of persons present—the large room being quite full—as well as irresistibly struck by the general air of seriousness which pervaded the assembly.

During the first prayer, he experienced an indefinable sensation of discomfort, amounting almost to regret, at finding himself so completely out of place. Herbert's language was too earnest, too vivid, too spiritual, for him to follow: he had not been accustomed to listen to such prayers; therefore, he did not understand them, and they only rendered him uncomfortable. If he could have managed to slip away unperceived, he would gladly have done so; but, unfortunately for his purpose, he was hemmed in on every side, and, notwithstanding his anxiety to depart, he did not wish to make himself the object of general observation.

As the service proceeded, his sentiments underwent a rapid change —he no longer wished himself away! He was, however, neither convinced of his own sinfulness, nor impressed with the desire of becoming himself a Christian; but he was softened—interested—pleased.

The singing in particular touched and elevated him—albeit those who engaged in it were rough, unskilful, unpretending men and women,—yes, and children, too,—to whom the science of music was unknown; and the clear, logical arrangement, and cogent arguments which characterised Herbert's discourse; the winning, yet uncompromising manner in which he inculcated Divine truth; his energetic, yet kindly spirit; his perfect simplicity and affectionate sincerity, proved very fascinating to the gay-hearted, impetuous young man, who, in spite of his usual careless and pleasure-loving disposition, was well able to discriminate between truth and error, and instantly detected the infinite superiority of these earnest, resistless, and plainly convincing arguments, to the false, puerile, and superficial reasoning he had often before listened to on the same lofty subject, with the greatest indifference and even impatience.

He wished to avoid speaking to Herbert at the end of the service, and for that purpose endeavoured to make his exit directly it was

over; but, in consequence of there being so many in front of him, he did not reach the door as quickly as he had intended. A man near him, seeing his anxiety to be gone, quietly but effectively opened a way for him through the crowd, and almost immediately he found himself once more in the open air. Looking around him, in order to find out who it was that had thus acted as his guide, he recognised the features of Mr. Seymour's head-gardener.

"Why, Lisburn," he said, "I did not expect to find *you* here."

The gardener touched his hat, which he had just resumed; but, though he might have expressed his own surprise at meeting Mr. Hastings, he contented himself with saying, in his usual tone of civility, "I dare say not, sir."

"Do you often attend these meetings?" inquired Mr. Hastings, walking on with him.

"Every week—sometimes oftener."

"And—speaking frankly and honestly—do you really like them?"

"Like them!" repeated the gardener, with warmth; "yes, I enjoy them most thoroughly."

"But is it not a hardship for you to be obliged to take such a long walk after your day's work?"

"I would, with the utmost pleasure, walk three times as far to hear Mr. Herbert preach," answered the old man, sturdily.

Charles Hastings seemed thoughtful for a minute; then he asked, "Are there any others of the same way of thinking?"

"Many, sir," said Lisburn, with emotion. "I could not, indeed, if I tried, tell you half of the good which he has been the means of accomplishing in this neighbourhood; but that his labours have been already blessed, and that abundantly, is a fact too well known to need confirmation."

"You are quite eloquent," returned Mr. Hastings, in a half-joking, half-serious tone; "and I must conclude from your energy in ascribing to him such unlimited honour, that you are one of my friend Herbert's staunchest and most devoted followers."

"Call, him rather a follower of Herbert's Master," said a voice behind them; and, on turning hastily round, Charles Hastings found his arm taken possession of by the young preacher, who had hurried after and reached them, just in time to overhear his last remark.

"You did not wait for me, Charles," he continued, gently.

"No; I could not tell how long you might be detained. Besides—shall I give you my other reason?"

"Unless you would rather not."

"Know, then, most reverend sir, that your preaching had a strange and startling effect upon me: it uprooted all my previously conceived ideas, and sent them wandering hither and thither in wild confusion; and I feared lest if I saw you while in such an extraordinary condition, and we were induced to hold a disquisition upon the intricacies of the human mind, I might be led to make an analysis of my own."

"And ignorance being in your case 'bliss,' you preferred it to knowledge—chaos to order—darkness to light?"

"Precisely so," answered Mr. Hastings, apparently not in the least offended at Herbert's plain speaking. "I knew that it would be no easy matter for me to attempt to regulate these rampant ideas of mine; and I also knew that, without any exertion on my part, they

would soon quietly settle down, and my mental vision be restored to its wonted clearness."

"Or, in other other words, you will extinguish the little light you have now received, and, instead of allowing the feeling of insecurity —which you cannot deny follows you at the present moment—to exercise a salutary influence upon your heart and conscience, you desire to exchange it for the treacherous calm which so often ushers in the thunder-storm."

"Ah, I guessed how it would end," returned Mr. Hastings, ruefully; "you are always against me, Herbert."

"*Against* you, my dear Charles," was the tenderly earnest reply; "on the contrary, it is because I am so sincerely interested in you that I thus speak."

"I know it," said the other, in a totally changed voice. "You have ever proved yourself my firm and faithful friend, notwithstanding my being quite unworthy of your affections."

They then wrung each other's hands, and exchanged a fervent good-night; and while Mr. Hastings took a cross road which led to his own home, Herbert, after waiting for Lisburn—who had respectfully fallen several yards behind—to come up to him, pursued his way to the Park, conversing, meanwhile, with this his fellow-disciple.

On reaching the house, he consulted his watch; and finding that Mr. Seymour's guests would not be likely to leave for half an hour, he could not resist the temptation of stealing to his own apartment, and spending a few minutes in self-examination and prayer, before appearing among them.

At length, with a serene spirit and unruffled countenance, he repaired to the drawing-room; and, by passing into it from an adjoining conservatory, he was enabled to make his entry without attracting any particular notice.

One glance showed him that Lady Emma was engaged in an animated conversation with young Mr. Hilton. Her mother occupied a couch not far from them; and, while ostensibly lending her exclusive attention to Sir William Crossley, who had been entertaining her with a long rambling account of a very trifling circumstance which took place the day before, she did not for one instant lose sight of her daughter. On first observing Herbert, she made a slight gesture of satisfaction, and pointed with a smile to a chair between herself and Lady Emma. But the young man was on his guard; for, though he responded to her pleased look of recognition, and even came forward and uttered a few ordinary words of polite inquiry, instead of remaining near her, and making use of the indicated chair, he crossed the room, and stationed himself close to Mrs. Hilton, an elderly lady, who was often in danger of being somewhat neglected—her deafness rendering it difficult for any one not thoroughly acquainted with her peculiarities, to sustain a connected dialogue when in her society.

Herbert, however, knew that if not a satisfactory listener, she only needed encouragement to become a fluent talker. All he did, therefore, was to ask a simple question regarding her health, which, when she understood, she answered, proceeding immediately afterwards to give him the history of a cold she had lately been suffering from, the remedies which had afforded her the greatest relief, and the best mode of treating colds in general. Then, gratified exceedingly at

Herbert's respectful and attentive manner, she went on to speak of other and more interesting subjects, until, to her surprise, she found that nearly all the guests had already left.

Her carriage was announced at the same moment as Lady Clifford's; and, much to Mr. Seymour's mortification, Herbert attended her to it with the utmost politeness; merely stopping long enough to wish Lady Emma a brief though kindly good-night, as he passed her on his way.

Mr. Seymour's brow looked stormy when he returned to the drawing-room, after having endeavoured himself to atone for his son's neglect. Whether that neglect had been wilful or undesigned, he could not at once determine; but he was inclined to consider it the result of premeditation: and, this being the case, he would probably have expressed his displeasure by words as well as looks, had he not been restrained by the presence of two or three visitors, who were staying in the house.

An hour later, Herbert was thoughtfully pacing the floor of his own room before retiring for the night. His musings were of a very mingled nature—hope and fear, encouragement and disappointment, pleasure and pain, being strangely and promiscuously blended together; and while a thousand inquietudes occupied his mind regarding the future, he was at the same instant animated by a thousand pleasing recollections of the past.

A gentle tap at the door roused him from his reveries; and on going to open it, he found his mother standing on the threshold.

"Herbert," she said, coming forward a few steps, "I want to speak to you for a moment."

A fleeting look of surprise crossed the young man's face, but he immediately wheeled a large chair close to the fire, for the night was chilly, and, turning to her with a pleasant smile, asked, "Will you not sit down, my dear mother?"

Mrs. Seymour made no reply, but she unresistingly suffered him to place her in the chair, and then remained for a short time silently gazing into the fire.

"I fear you are very tired," remarked Herbert, when a few minutes had thus elapsed.

"Oh, no," she answered, lifting her head, and regarding him with a quick glance of affection; "but I certainly seem to be forgetting what I had to say to you. To-morrow being your birthday, I knew I should have no convenient opportunity of seeing you alone; therefore I decided on bringing you my little gift now. Here it is," she continued, hastily unfastening a velvet case which she held in her hand, and taking from it a beautiful portrait of herself, set with large diamonds; "I hope you will like it."

"The difficulty would be not to like it," returned Herbert, gazing admiringly at the picture, which was indeed an admirable likeness. "How I shall prize it! the eyes are so exact—and the hair, and the mouth wears the very smile I love so much to see on it. Really it is a most successful effort, and the artist deserves unqualified praise. But—pardon me for saying so—these diamonds were quite an unnecessary addition; the portrait would, in my opinion, be equally valuable without them."

Mrs. Seymour smiled at his simplicity, but she was delighted to find that he was really pleased with the likeness; for, though she had

sat for several to the first living artists, this was the only one Herbert had ever liked.

Presently, Mrs. Seymour began to speak of the arrangements which had been made for the next day; and, in enumerating her expected guests, mentioned the names of Lady Clifford and her daughter.

"There will be no dancing, my dear," she hastened to assure him, on seeing that his face became grave; "instead of the ball with which we used to celebrate——"

She suddenly stopped, for Herbert had started from his seat, and was pacing the room with uncontrollable agitation.

"Mother," he said, pausing at length in front of her, and speaking gravely and significantly, "for the future I should wish to avoid Lady Emma's society as much as possible."

"Why, what has happened?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, anxiously; "has she in any way given you cause to alter your opinion of her?"

"Certainly not," rejoined Herbert, smiling slightly; "my opinion has undergone no change whatever. I need not, however, particularise," he went on, speaking more seriously; "it is enough that we have nothing in common, and doubtless Lady Clifford would be herself the first to complain, if she heard her daughter's name coupled with mine."

"Indeed you are mistaken," cried Mrs. Seymour, incautiously betraying more than she had intended. "Lady Clifford is most anxious——"

"I cannot understand that," said Herbert, thoughtfully; "she is proud and ambitious."

"Be it so," returned Mrs. Seymour, haughtily, and with considerable warmth; "I should imagine that the son of a Seymour and a Haughton might with every confidence aspire to the hand of an earl's daughter. Besides," she observed, in a gentler tone, "Lady Emma has no fortune—none worth speaking of, I mean—you forget that. But if you really feel averse to this arrangement, which I must confess your father and Lady Clifford have both set their hopes on, I will give you all the assistance in my power."

"Thanks, my dear mother," said Herbert, gratefully. "How I wish," he added, with an involuntary sigh, "that my father could be induced to treat me with the same confidence and affection!"

"You must have patience," answered Mrs. Seymour, re-echoing the sigh. "I would gladly shield you from his anger, if I could; for I fear——"

"You?" exclaimed the young man, quickly, a shade of sadness crossing his expressive countenance; "do you not know that the mere idea of *your* having to undergo even the slightest amount of suffering on my account would add tenfold to my anxieties? Thank God," he continued, fervently, after a pause, "for the comforting assurance that all things work together for good to them that love Him: this precious promise I can claim as my own; will not you, my dearest mother, make it yours also?"

Mrs. Seymour shook her head despondingly, but did not otherwise reply to his question.

A few minutes later she rose from her seat, laid her hand caressingly upon the young man's shoulder, gazed wistfully and tenderly into his face, and, after uttering a word or two of earnest affection, departed, leaving him once more alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

WISDOM AND FOLLY.

"No disappointment could he ever brook:
The brook of patience he must always cross
For every little cross. He cross would even look
If nothing he might have to cause him trouble,
Which would his crave for anger e'en support.
Pile upon pile he'd build it, till 'twould double,
Then vent his rage where'er it vent could find,
Finding the venting served to ease his mind."

MRS. SEYMOUR did not deem it advisable or expedient to repeat to her husband what had passed between herself and Herbert, respecting Lady Emma Clifford; for, knowing that he would be made acquainted with the young man's resolution quite soon enough without her intervention, she was unwilling to be the first to communicate such distasteful and unwelcome tidings.

A short time served to prove the correctness of her conjecture. Mr. Seymour, whose suspicions had been already aroused, watched Herbert's demeanour with additional vigilance. He observed that, if he happened to be accidentally or unavoidably thrown into the young lady's society, he treated her as he had always done—with kindness and well-bred politeness; but, so far from voluntarily seeking her, he scrupulously avoided her whenever he could do so without being guilty of absolute rudeness.

Neither pleasure nor profit could be derived by lingering too long upon this particular page of Herbert's history; but my readers can easily picture to themselves Mr. Seymour's wrath when he found his well-laid schemes thus quietly frustrated.

"Really," he said angrily to his wife—forced at last to come to the humiliating conclusion that it was useless to press the matter further—"Herbert seems to embrace every opportunity of thwarting me; since taking up these strange fantastical notions, which he holds so pertinaciously, he has been transformed into one of the most obdurate and perverse young men I ever met with."

"Do you think so, my dear?" returned Mrs. Seymour, in a tone of feigned indifference, turning her head uneasily away as she spoke, lest she should betray her real feelings. "Now I should have said——"

"Pooh!" he answered, in a half-contemptuous, half-amused voice, "who would ever dream of asking *your* opinion, my love? of course you are naturally disposed to make the best of him; but I cannot be quite blind to his defects."

Mrs. Seymour's cheek grew pale, and her heart swelled within her, as her thoughts reverted to the time when he had refused to see a single imperfection in Herbert's character. And yet, how improved and beautified that character had become since then! how much

more gentle, thoughtful, and considerate! how self-denying and self-sacrificing! how patient, forbearing, and forgiving!

"It is, however, fortunate," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, suddenly breaking in upon her reflections, "that the time for our going to London is so near—perhaps we may have less difficulty with him there."

"Perhaps," sighed Mrs. Seymour, mechanically, without well knowing what she was saying.

"If he once gets into his old set again," proceeded the gentleman, almost cheerfully, after he had thought for a minute, "all will be well; the remembrance of former associations and pleasures will prove too strong for him;" and with this faint hope he consoled himself.

But even in London disappointment awaited him; for he found that Herbert's erewhile companions had entirely lost their influence over him, and not all their united persuasions could induce him to return to the frivolous pursuits which occupied their own time and attention.

His (Herbert's) days and nights were spent in a very different manner. On every hand he saw want and suffering, destitution and misery, oppression and despair; and many a happy hour he spent in striving to lift the fallen from the mire of sin, to soothe and comfort the sorrowing, alleviate the distresses of the afflicted, and minister to the necessities of those who were undergoing privation and suffering.

It would not be easy to describe Mr. Seymour's feelings when, at the close of the season, they returned to Mertonsville. He was both irritated and irritable; and, while he conceived that Herbert had given him just cause of indignation by opposing his wishes and defeating his expectations, the fact of his being unable to offer any tangible reason for his anger served only to deepen the resentment he unfortunately bore him.

His anger was not expressed by words—for he seldom addressed his son now—but the heavy, louring brow, his sullenness and taciturnity, his perseverance in repelling the young man's well-meant advances, his utter indifference as to where and how he spent his time, and the pettishness with which he often turned away when he saw him approaching, gave abundant and convincing proof of the bitter feelings he nourished towards him.

Had they been alone together, this state of things could scarcely have continued; but, as the whole summer was spent either in entertaining or visiting friends, Mr. Seymour and his son did not often meet, except in the presence of others.

On one of these rare occasions, Herbert summoned up all his resolution, and made an earnest and eloquent attempt to soften his father's heart and overcome his ill-concealed displeasure; but the cold, sneering, almost mocking replies which he received caused him a bitter pang of anguish, and, besides showing him the hopelessness of the task he had set himself, presented Mr. Seymour's character in an entirely new and unfavourable light.

He was aware—though he had previously shrunk from admitting the fact, even to his own heart—that a casual word or look had often proved strong enough to arouse his father's pride and indignation; and he also knew that when once irritated he could not be easily appeased. But he had hitherto formed no conception of the strength

and continuance of his animosity. He had considered him hasty and somewhat imperious; now, however, he appeared harsh, domineering, and overbearing. And it was only by making a violent effort that the young man was enabled to restrain himself from replying to his exasperating words.

About a week after this interview, Herbert found, on his return from a friend's house, where he had been spending a few days, that during his absence old Mrs. Gordon had been taken seriously ill. As soon as possible he hastened to visit her, and was grieved to notice the sad alteration which had been produced in her appearance. She was herself conscious that her end was fast approaching, and her one great desire was to employ the little time that yet remained in preparing for the important change which awaited her. She had been for many years a professing Christian; but, as her religion consisted of mere theoretic knowledge of gospel truths, it brought her no real comfort, no abiding peace, no solid joy. The precious privilege of leading her to the "grace of God," that bringeth full, free, and everlasting salvation, was reserved for Herbert; and eagerly she listened, and drank in every word; cheerfully renounced her own imperfect works, and "with a true heart, in full assurance of faith," drew near to God, pleaded His own gracious promises, and laid hold of the hope set before her in the gospel.

From that time forward her intercourse with Herbert was of a deeply interesting nature, for her progress in Divine things was very rapid. Every day she seemed to receive some fresh communication of spiritual enlightenment and understanding, and to become better acquainted with those treasures of wisdom and knowledge which are hid in Christ; every day she enjoyed sweet, intimate, soul-vitalising communion with God, and looked forward with joyful anticipation to the hour when she should see His face, and dwell for ever in His glorious presence.

Her life had not been one of uninterrupted tranquillity; for after the death of her husband, to whom she had been fondly attached, she was painfully tried by the undutiful conduct of her only son, a high-spirited lad, whose wild, ungovernable temper rendered him impatient of restraint, and led him to disobey her commands, and act contrary to her kindly expressed wishes, whenever he felt so disposed.

Each succeeding year, as it rolled away, found him more anxious to gratify his own sinful propensities, without bestowing a single thought upon the comfort or convenience of his widowed mother, whose stay and support he ought to have been; and at last, to add to her grief, in spite of her entreaties and remonstrances, he began to associate with several idle and dissipated young men in the neighbourhood; and, after a few weeks' intimacy, he agreed to accompany them to a foreign land.

Accordingly he watched his opportunity, and, without breathing a syllable of his intentions to any one, he rose from his bed one night, and, having made his clothes into a bundle, stealthily proceeded downstairs, where he quickly possessed himself of all Mrs. Gordon's little treasures, including her husband's watch, which she greatly prized, together with whatever money he could find; and then, trembling in every limb—for guilt transforms even the bravest men into poor, weak, abject cowards—he left the cottage which had sheltered him all his life, the mother who had nursed him in infancy, watched over

him in childhood, borne with the waywardness and ingratitude of youth, and loved him, notwithstanding his numerous and serious delinquencies.

Early the next morning his absence was discovered; for the empty drawers in his own chamber, the ransacked desk in the widow's little parlour, the missing watch and purse, told their significant tale, and filled poor Mrs. Gordon's heart with apprehension and dismay. She did not, however, waste her time in mere idle repinings; but, rallying her scattered energies, she quickly followed her truant son to the nearest seaport town, where she lost all trace of him, and her earnest and repeated inquiries regarding him elicited no satisfactory information, for she could neither find out by what vessel he had sailed, nor whither he was bound, and she returned to her cottage home at length, lonely, dejected, and desolate, to wait, and watch, and hope, and pray for the erring wanderer.

Fifteen long weary years had passed away since then, and the widow's hair had become white with age, and her brow furrowed by care. For fifteen years she had hoped against hope, patiently waited and fervently prayed for her absent son, and yet she knew not whether that son was numbered among the living or the dead.

Herbert frequently visited her during her last illness; and many a precious and profitable lesson she was the unconscious means of teaching him as her end drew near.

One day he went to her cottage as usual, and, to his delight, found her considerably better than she had been for many weeks.

But the same evening there was a large party at Mertonsville Park; and when Herbert was standing for a moment somewhat apart from the others, conversing earnestly with Charles Hastings, a servant approached him, and said in a low tone, "I am sorry to disturb you, sir, but a message has just been received from old Mrs. Gordon, who is, it seems, constantly asking for you; shall I say that you are engaged?"

"By no means, Wilmot. If you will ask Dawson to get my horse ready, I will go to her immediately. I hope, however, that I shall not find her worse than usual."

"She is dying, sir," returned the man in an awe-stricken whisper.

"Dying!" repeated Herbert. "Oh, I trust not. Charles," he continued, laying his hand lightly upon his friend's arm, "will you try to make my absence as little perceived as possible?"

"Of course I will do my best," answered Mr. Hastings, "but it appears to me that you are undertaking not only an unpleasant, but an unnecessary duty; for of what use can you be to the poor creature, if she is really dying?"

"Not much, I fear," said Herbert, gravely. "We are often

> ——'Doomed to stand inactive by,
> Watching the soul's or body's agony,
> Which human effort helps not to make less.'

And yet 'the heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.'"

This he said as if thinking aloud. He did not remember that his words might be taken in a double sense, until he caught sight of Charles Hastings' face of suppressed amusement, and heard him exclaim in accents of well-feigned consternation, after casting a

peculiarly expressive glance upon the gay crowd of pleasure-seekers around him,—

"If this is the test of wisdom, I am afraid there is only one wise man amongst us—all the others are fools!"

Herbert could not stop to reply to his words; he quitted him, therefore, with a dissenting shake of the head, and quietly left the room and the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

"'Twas love, whose quick and ever-watchful eye
The wanderer's first step homeward did espy." TRENCH.

ON reaching Mrs. Gordon's cottage, Herbert was instantly admitted to the sick room. Though she had evidently gone through much and sharp suffering since he saw her in the morning, the widow's face was perfectly tranquil and serene in its expression; and notwithstanding her extreme bodily weakness, she was able to welcome him with something of her old warmth and satisfaction.

She fell back upon her pillow, however, immediately afterwards, faint and exhausted by the effort, and did not speak again for several minutes.

Herbert, meanwhile, turned aside, and anxiously questioned her sister, who had been residing with her for some time past, regarding her condition; but the information she gave him was very discouraging, and he resumed his place near the dying woman's bed, and gazed earnestly upon the pale, worn face with a feeling of deep sadness. An expression of intense pleasure passed over those wasted features, when she next unclosed her eyes, and met the not-to-be-mistaken look of disinterested grief and sincere sympathetic sorrow with which he was observing her.

"I thought you would come," she murmured in a feeble voice.

"It pains me exceedingly to find you so much worse," replied the young man, gently. "What can I do for you?"

She pointed with a smile to her Bible, which lay on a chair close at hand. Herbert took the hint, and opening it at the fourteenth chapter of St. John, read aloud those precious soul-comforting words which Christ so tenderly addressed to His sorrowing disciples when about to leave them. She listened with hands clasped and eyes raised to heaven, repeating after him from time to time such passages as she most loved. Especially did she linger upon the verse—

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

"Ah! if I had always remembered this," she said, and her voice seemed to grow stronger and stronger as she proceeded, "how much fruitless anxiety, vain regret, and unprofitable labour should I have been spared! How often has my own heart been weighed down under the depressing load of accumulated sorrow, when Christ was willing and waiting to bear it Himself! How unnecessarily troubled I have been! how needlessly fearful!"

"But it is so no longer," replied Herbert, quickly. "'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'"

"Yes, thank God!" responded the good woman, with astonishing earnestness. "No anxious cares oppress me now; for I have laid them all upon Jesus, and can safely leave everything in His gracious hands, feeling assured that whatever He does is—must be—well."

She paused, and Herbert, who guessed whither her thoughts were tending, repeated in a low, distinct tone, "'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.' 'The seed of the righteous shall be delivered.' 'I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.'"

"I firmly believe it," exclaimed Mrs. Gordon, her face glowing with a heavenly joy. "You are aware," she continued after the lapse of a minute, "that from the very commencement of my illness I have had a great and sore yearning towards my long-lost son, and have desired—oh how ardently!—either to see him or hear some news of him before I die; for, although it seems to be generally supposed that he lost his life years ago, I still cherish the hope—amounting, indeed, almost to certainty—that he is yet alive. God has not seen fit to grant me my desire, and now——"

"You mean to say that the struggle is now over," said Herbert, as she stopped and gasped for breath, "and you are resigned to God's will?"

"Perfectly—entirely," she murmured. "He knows best. Besides, I believe my son will yet be saved."

She spoke the last words slowly and emphatically, as if she were perfectly sure they would be fulfilled; so true is it that

> "Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
> And looks to that alone;
> Laughs at impossibilities,
> And says, 'It shall be done.'"

More than half an hour passed away in that little cottage, during which the aged pilgrim sank rapidly.

Powerful stimulants were several times administered, but they seemed to have scarcely any effect upon her; and Herbert was just consulting her sister as to the advisability of sending to request the doctor's attendance, when Mrs. Gordon suddenly reopened her eyes, and fixing them intently upon him, said in an audible whisper, "Will you read to me once more the story of the returning prodigal?"

Herbert complied.

"Listen! dear Rachel," she said, turning, and speaking in a voice of tremulous emotion, to her sister, who was silently weeping at the foot of the bed; "listen to the loving manner in which Christ welcomes returning sinners to Himself; and if ever my son should come back, receive him without a word of chiding or reproach. Tell him I left him a mother's last blessing; and tell him also—tenderly and affectionately—that I shall expect to meet him in heaven."

"I will," sobbed the sorrowful woman.

"And now, my dear Mr. Herbert, I feel that I am almost home—will you pray for me before I go?"

Herbert fell upon his knees, and lifted his voice in fervent supplicating prayer. After beseeching the Lord to grant unto the dying woman dying grace, to enable her to pass through the dark valley trustfully and confidingly, leaning upon her soul's Beloved, and enter triumphantly into full possession of the heavenly inheritance, where she would enjoy the inexpressible happiness of uninterrupted, blissful, face-to-face communion with her Saviour, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb for ever and ever, he went on to plead for the

conversion of her son, that he might—if indeed he were yet alive—be convinced of his own sin and misery, be softened, subdued, and repentant; pardoned, sanctified, and saved, so that at last mother and son might be reunited in the mansions of glory.

As Herbert concluded his prayer, and was about to rise from his knees, he was surprised to hear a loud, deep sob, or rather groan, proceeding apparently from some one behind him, who appeared to be suffering the most intense and uncontrollable anguish. On looking hastily around him, he became aware that they were no longer alone.

A man, about thirty-five years of age, clad in rough and somewhat tattered garments, stood leaning against a chair, with his face partially hidden in his hands, and his whole frame convulsed with grief.

At first, Mrs. Gordon took no notice of what was going on; for her eyes were still closed, her hands folded, and her lips moving in supplication; but the unwonted sounds seemed at length to produce a strange and startling impression upon her. She suddenly lifted her head, and, forgetful of her excessive weakness, raised herself in the bed, and gazed eagerly and searchingly into every corner of the room. As her eye lighted on the stranger, a cry of joy escaped her lips, and a look of ineffable contentment passed over her pallid face.

"Can it be that God has heard my prayer, and permitted me to see my son before I die? Speak to me, James—is it not you?"

The man removed his hands from his face, on hearing her voice, thereby displaying his countenance, every feature of which was working with intense excitement.

"It *is* himself," continued the widow. "Come nearer," she added in accents of tender affection, "and let me kiss you, my son."

He approached the bed, still without speaking, and instantly she clasped him in a long, warm, loving embrace, repeating to herself the words she had so lately listened to—"'This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'"

"O mother, dear mother," cried the unhappy man, while tears ran down his weather-beaten cheeks, "is it possible that you will forgive all the pain and sorrow I have so wickedly and wilfully caused you?"

"Possible! O James, you little know the depth of a mother's love, or you would not need to ask such a question. Everything has been long ago forgiven and forgotten, and now my last prayer is that you may, while losing an earthly parent, find a heavenly one—a friend who will never leave you nor forsake you."

"But must you really die?" asked the man, in a voice of touching earnestness. "Must you leave me without giving me an opportunity of atoning in some measure for my past misconduct? Oh, no," he added passionately, "I cannot lose you thus!"

"We shall soon meet again, James," was the solemn answer, "in that blessed country where separation and pain and death are unknown."

"But, alas! I have no hope of seeing you there," returned her son, in a choking voice. "You have been always good, while I——"

"Do not speak of my goodness," interrupted the dying woman. "I have been a poor guilty sinner all my life, and if I rested only upon my own doings, I must inevitably perish; but glory be to God——"

She paused, overcome by her exertions, and looked appealingly at Herbert, who had been a silent, but by no means indifferent, spectator of the affecting scene.

He instantly comprehended her meaning, and coming forward a few steps, and laying his hand kindly upon the man's arm, said slowly and seriously,—"'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us. For by grace are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; *it is the gift of God.*'"

A few minutes' silence succeeded, and then Herbert bent anxiously over the sufferer's bed, and spoke again.

"'My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name:
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.'"

"That's it, James," exclaimed the mother, rousing herself once more, "that is the only true foundation of a sinner's hope. Oh! see to it that *you* build upon it, my son."

She wished to say more, but a deadly feeling of faintness, followed by a half-delirious doze, came over her, and for some time they gave up all expectation of hearing her speak again. At length, however, her consciousness returned, and she said softly, "My eyes are becoming dim, so that I cannot see you clearly."

"There shall be no night there," returned Herbert.

A look of calm and holy joy lighted up her countenance, and she instantly replied, "The Lamb is the light thereof." Then, as if fresh strength had been imparted to her, she took Herbert's hand in both of her own, and exclaimed fervently, "Farewell, my dear Mr. Herbert,—farewell! May God bless and reward you for all the kindness you have shown to me; may He crown your labours with abundant success, and may you be encouraged, while sowing in tears, to look forward to the time when you shall reap in joy."

"One last request I have to make," she continued, after a moment's silence; and she glanced significantly at her son, who was kneeling with his face hidden in the bed-clothes, the very picture of hopeless misery.

"I understand you," replied Herbert, quickly; and he bent down and whispered a few words in her ear.

She smiled a sweet satisfied smile; uttered a brief ejaculation of thanks; carried his hand gratefully to her lips; and after taking an affecting leave, first of her sister and then of her son, quietly lay back on her pillow, and while in the act of repeating these expressive lines—

"His oath, His covenant, and blood,
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay:
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand"—

She gently fell asleep, and, without a struggle or a sigh, entered the pilgrim's rest.

On perceiving that his mother was indeed dead, James Gordon's grief became indescribable. There was something almost appalling in his first vehement outburst of passionate sorrow: anguish, regret, agony, remorse, being added to the suffering which he must naturally have experienced on losing a tender and affectionate parent.

Herbert addressed a few kindly sentences of sympathy and comfort, and urged on him the importance of allowing the painful event which had just occurred to have a salutary effect upon him; but he knew that it was yet too soon to expect him to listen to suggestions or advice, however well meant they might be; and therefore he soon took his leave, promising to call the following day, and rode home, feeling deeply impressed by the solemnising scene he had witnessed.

CHAPTER XV.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT.

"Sorrows like showers descend; and as the heart
For them prepares, they good or ill impart." CRABBE.

ACCORDING to his promise, Herbert visited James Gordon the next morning. He found him much calmer than he had been the day before, but still very sorrowful and depressed.

For a time his manner was subdued almost to sullenness, and his communications guarded and reserved. He evidently looked with suspicion upon every attempt to gain his confidence, and wished, before committing himself further than he had already done, to ascertain the nature of Herbert's designs towards him. But he could not long withstand the latter's continued kindness and unaffected sympathy; and, as his feelings became gradually softer and less restrained, he threw aside all distrust, and began to speak frankly and freely of his own present circumstances, and also to enter into details regarding his past history—which details need not, however, be repeated here.

He expressed sincere sorrow for the many sins he had been guilty of, and assured Herbert that never since the night when he so unadvisedly left his widowed mother's roof, had he experienced a single day's real peace or comfort.

"But," asked Herbert, in surprise, as he made this unexpected confession, "if almost immediately afterwards you repented of the step you so rashly took, why did you not think of returning to your mother, who would have joyfully received you again?"

"It was too late," returned the man, with a melancholy smile; "my companions had too firm a hold upon me."

"But surely you might have written," suggested Herbert, in a kindly tone, "and relieved her mind about you."

"Nothing that I could tell her would have been calculated to afford her relief," said James Gordon, bitterly.

"True; although it appears to me that suspense——"

"Besides," pursued the other, "a sense of shame held me back; for how could I venture to expect indulgence from one whom I had so grievously deceived, and that one my mother? If I *had* written to her, what excuse could I have offered for my conduct, or in what way accounted for so unnaturally requiting her affection? Pride, too, prevented my acknowledging the extent of my degradation; for it was not long before I was reduced to want, and from want I passed on to despair, and *then*," he continued in a voice of suppressed agitation, "I preferred that my poor mother should suppose me dead."

Herbert mused for a minute or two upon the strange and glaring inconsistencies of the man's character; such a mixture of pride and humility, recklessness and prudence, thoughtful consideration of his

mother's feelings on the one hand, and thoughtless disregard of them on the other.

"And what induced you to return at last?" he inquired in a tone of lively interest.

"I scarcely know how to answer you," said the other, thoughtfully, "for even to myself everything seems involved in mystery."

"Indeed!" said Herbert, looking at him in visible surprise.

"I retired to rest one night," proceeded James Gordon, in a low, impressive voice, "after a hard day's work, tired and dispirited; but for several hours tossed restlessly upon my miserable bed, unable to obtain a moment's repose. At length I fell into a short uneasy doze, and while in this state, apparently between sleeping and waking, the image of my mother came, or appeared to come, most vividly before me, and while I gazed earnestly upon her well-remembered features, she bent over me with a smile, and whispered a few clear, distinct words in my ear. This circumstance, trifling and unimportant as you may perhaps deem it, exercised a powerful influence over me, and I at once felt an irresistible desire to see my dear mother again, and obtain, if possible, her forgiveness."

"Do you recollect the words which you imagined she addressed to you?" asked Herbert.

"I do, sir," answered the man; "they have haunted my memory ever since; and, strange to say," he added, with an agitation that rendered his voice slightly tremulous, "they were the very same which I heard you read to her shortly before her death. I was listening outside the door for some time before I ventured in, and nothing that passed escaped me."

He stopped abruptly, and buried his face in his hands, quite overcome at the remembrance of the painful scene.

"You have not yet told me the precise words you refer to," observed Herbert, presently.

James Gordon lifted his head, and, suppressing by a strong effort the violent and palpable emotion which convulsed his frame, he replied, "'I will arise, and go to my Father.'"

"Strange indeed," said Herbert, meditatively; 'passing strange! That was part of your mother's favourite chapter. Truly God's ways are 'past finding out.' How wonderful are the means He often employs to bring poor wandering sinners back to Himself!"

"What do you mean, sir?" exclaimed the other, giving a quick start of surprise.

"Simply this, my friend: I believe that God, who deals with us according to our several necessities and peculiar dispositions and capabilities, saw fit, in His infinite wisdom, to adopt the method you have described in order to arrest you in your guilty career, and lead you to seek and find, not only your earthly, but also your heavenly parent."

"Oh, if I only thought so!" returned James Gordon, rising hastily from his seat, and walking several times rapidly across the room, in extreme perturbation, "if I only thought so! But no," he continued, sinking down in his seat again, and forcing himself to become calm; "I feel you are wrong, sir—it cannot be."

"Listen to His own words: 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' Is not that a cheering promise?"

"Yes; but it is not for me," rejoined the unhappy man. "I have several times lately tried to pray, but it seems like mockery. The recollection of a thousand sins flashes across my mind, and a thousand voices seem to ring in my ears, saying that there is no hope!—no hope," he repeated in a hollow voice, grasping with a spasmodic clutch the back of a chair, "for those who have sinned like me."

Herbert allowed him to become somewhat composed before he spoke to him again. Then, laying his hand gently on his arm, he said impressively, "Do you not know that Jesus Christ came into the world to save *sinners?*—so that the very fact of your being a sinner, instead of rendering you hopeless, should of itself satisfy you that there is pardon even for you. Jesus said, 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance.' Will not this satisfy you?"

The man shook his head; but Herbert was well pleased to observe that the expression of his face betokened now rather thought than despair, and after offering up a brief prayer, he left him to his own reflections.

When he next saw him, his countenance was again overcast with a black cloud of hopeless misery, for Mrs. Gordon's remains had been just consigned to the grave, and while taking part in the melancholy ceremonial, the poor man could not restrain himself from giving vent to the most bitter lamentations and self-upbraidings.

"Well, sir," he said gloomily, accosting Herbert as he saw him entering the cottage, "I thought over all you told me, but it was exactly as I feared. I can get neither comfort nor hope; for whichever way I turn I see nothing but impenetrable darkness."

"That is a sad condition to be in," replied Herbert.

"It is; but after all, what else can I expect?" returned the man, in a tone of utter dejection. "It almost seems," he went on, dropping his voice to a low, intensified whisper, "as if the gnawings of remorse which I now feel must bear some resemblance to the torments of the lost in hell."

"There is one stupendous difference," observed Herbert, gravely, "between your condition and theirs—*they* are beyond the reach of mercy, without the privilege of prayer, uninfluenced and unblessed by hope."

"*I* have no hope," he answered bitterly.

"I am sorry for it," rejoined Herbert, quietly; "but I am bound to tell you it is entirely your own fault. God's declaration is plain enough—'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool;' but as, by refusing His offered mercy, you tacitly deny either His willingness or power to perform what He has promised, you must of course abide the consequences."

"*I deny God's power!*" exclaimed James Gordon, aghast at the implied reproach; "no, no, sir; never, even amidst my blackest crimes, did I presume to go so far as that. I believe that He has absolute power both in heaven and on earth."

"Is your mind firmly made up on that point?" asked Herbert, glad to have at length roused him from the state of apathetic despair in which he found him.

"Certainly," was the unhesitating reply.

"Then it follows that God could save you?"

"Doubtless He *could* do so," returned the other, slowly and anxiously, "if such was His will."

"And what *is* His will concerning you?" asked Herbert, gravely.

The man fixed his eyes intently on him, as if eager for him to say more; and he continued, taking his little Bible from his pocket, and opening it, "Here is the answer, clear, convincing, unalterable: 'The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;' and, again, 'He will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom *for all*.'"

James Gordon clasped his hands together, and looked quickly up at Herbert as if he would have spoken; but, checking himself, he resolutely closed his lips, and waited to hear what would come next.

"A leper once came to Jesus, and said, 'Lord, *if Thou wilt*, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth His hand, and touched him, saying, *I will:* be thou clean; and immediately the leprosy departed from him.'"

He said no more; but rising from his seat, put some tracts which he had brought with him for the purpose into James Gordon's hands, and with a grave inclination of the head, took his departure, trusting that the impression which had been made upon the poor man's heart might be deepened and increased, until he too should hear the words, "I will: be thou clean," spoken to his sorrowful, sin-stained soul, by the Great Physician, and be enabled to go on his way rejoicing.

Nor was this hope disappointed; for, as Herbert was passing the widow's cottage a day or two afterwards, he was accosted by her sister, who had noticed his approach from the window, and hurried to meet him.

"Will you come in for a minute or two, sir?" she asked in a tone of unusual excitement. "James is very anxious to see you."

She opened the door of the little sitting-room as she put the question; and before Herbert was able to make any inquiry regarding her nephew's frame of mind, he found himself in his presence.

But how can I describe the happy change which had been effected in his appearance since last Herbert saw him, or how express the latter's delight when, springing up and advancing impulsively towards him, he exclaimed, in accents of the deepest gratitude and love, while peace and serenity shone on every feature of his embrowned countenance,—

"Thank God, sir, the struggle is over! all the clouds have rolled away, and I can now say—in the words of that beautiful hymn you left with me,—

'Thy tears, not mine, O Christ,
Have wept my guilt away,
And turned this night of mine
Into a blessed day.'"

"Light and joy instead of darkness and despair! O James, what an inexpressibly glorious change!"

"It is indeed, sir!" assented the other, energetically; "and *to me* —only think of that, sir—to me, the very chief of sinners!"

CHAPTER XVI.

JAMES GORDON RECEIVES NOTICE TO QUIT.

"Dejected, sad, and lone, and blighted." BYRON.

WE left Herbert Seymour standing in Mrs. Gordon's little cottage, thankfully listening to her repentant son's account of the marvellous and unspeakably happy change which he had experienced.

A few days subsequently, we find him sitting at breakfast—the first time for many weeks—alone with his mother and Mr. Seymour.

The meal was a very silent one; but before it was ended, Herbert, who for some reason or other appeared unusually thoughtful, exchanged a brief, almost imperceptible glance with Mrs. Seymour; and then turning towards his father, said, addressing him in a tone of gentle and respectful consideration,—

"I suppose you know that James Gordon returned in time to see his mother before she died?"

Mr. Seymour lifted his eyes from his plate, and fixed them coldly upon his son, while answering curtly,—"So I have been informed."

"Perhaps you have also heard," continued the young man, forcing himself to proceed, though he felt considerable hesitation in doing so, "that he is thoroughly ashamed of his past conduct, and fully resolved to lead a very different life for the time to come."

A contemptuous smile curled Mr. Seymour's lip; but Herbert went on steadily, without appearing to take any notice of it,—

"I have been endeavouring to find out the state of his affairs, and regret to say that at present his circumstances seem far from prosperous."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, in a tone of sincere commiseration, while her husband preserved a dignified silence.

"I promised his mother," said Herbert, after a moment's reflection, "that I would do all in my power for him."

"And what, may I presume to inquire, are your benevolent intentions regarding him?" demanded Mr. Seymour, sarcastically.

"I thought—that is, I hoped," faltered the young man, "that you would allow him to retain possession of his mother's cottage, where——"

"Where," interpolated his father, with a sneer, "I could have the privilege of supporting him in luxurious idleness."

"By no means," returned Herbert, warmly. "He is most anxious to find employment; and I ventured to tell him that, by applying to Gibson, he would at once be furnished with some suitable occupation."

Not a muscle of Mr. Seymour's stern countenance relaxed as he answered coolly and pitilessly,—"It will be quite useless for him to take that trouble, as I have already given Gibson instructions to refuse his application, should he make one."

Herbert started; and the blood rushed to his temples at this

unequivocal declaration of his father's sentiments. Expostulatory words, too, trembled on his lips: but he repressed them, and wisely resolved to remain silent rather than betray any unseemly warmth of manner.

Meanwhile, Mr. Seymour leisurely proceeded to finish his breakfast, which he did with a face that seemed, by its calmness and complacency, to say the matter was conclusively and satisfactorily settled.

His gentle wife regarded him for an instant in utter amazement, and appeared uncertain whether to speak or remain silent. She was still wavering when Herbert, observing that his father was about to leave the room, said, in a low, earnest tone,—

"I should feel very grateful to you if you would reconsider your determination, and for this once agree to——"

"Unfortunately my mind is made up," dryly returned Mr. Seymour; "further discussion is therefore unnecessary."

"But what is the poor man to do?" asked Herbert, in a voice of grave concern.

"That is his business, not mine," was the answer, spoken coldly and haughtily.

"If you would only give him a trial," implored the young man.

"I will encourage no reprobates on my estate," said Mr. Seymour, remorselessly.

"So assured am I of James Gordon's steadfastness of purpose, that I would cheerfully hold myself responsible for his future conduct," rejoined Herbert, eagerly.

"Doubtless," replied his father, with an air of indifference. "But does it never happen that your ideas and opinions are in exact opposition to mine?"

"It grieves me bitterly when such is the case. In the present instance, however, I am convinced you would have every reason to be satisfied with——"

"I have already intimated that enough has been said on the subject," interrupted Mr. Seymour, waxing impatient. "My resolution, once taken, is unalterable."

Herbert sighed; and Mrs. Seymour, who had been several times on the point of adding her entreaties to his, felt her heart sink within her as she listened to these last expressive words, so significant of her husband's character.

Without giving Herbert an opportunity of replying, Mr. Seymour continued,—"It is all very well for you to call the man a reformed character and so forth, because (probably for the purpose of accomplishing his own ends) he expresses, or pretends to express, regret for what he has done; but I am keen-sighted enough to see through such hypocrisy."

"Hypocrisy!" echoed Herbert, softly, almost without being aware that he spoke at all.

"And now that this matter is arranged," pursued the gentleman, rising from his seat, and speaking in a stern, determined voice, while his brow grew dark and contracted, "permit me to observe that in my opinion it would be better for yourself if you were to keep somewhat aloof from such men as James Gordon. You have heard the term I just now applied to him. I should be sorry to include——"

A meaning smile, cold, bitter, sarcastic, and severe, filled up the

sentence; and he must have seen by the reproachful look with which his wife regarded him as he left the table, and proceeded to gather his letters and papers together preparatory to carrying them away with him, that she, as well as Herbert, fully understood and keenly felt his cutting and ungenerous inuendo.

The latter's heart was stabbed by a sense of undeserved injury; and, while deeply regretting the signal failure of the effort he had made on behalf of James Gordon, he likewise realized more vividly than he had yet done the bitterness and inveteracy of Mr. Seymour's enmity towards himself, and the wide, impassable gulf that seemed to separate them from each other's sympathy or affection.

"What a coward I am!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, with a deep-drawn breath, as the door closed upon her husband.

Herbert, who had also risen to leave the room, turned quickly round on hearing her speak; and, forgetting his own anxieties while observing the sombre expression of her countenance, he said with as much cheerfulness as he could under the circumstances assume, "Why should you accuse yourself of cowardice?"

"Because, so averse am I to anything like argument, that, much as I wished to take poor Gordon's part, I was deterred from making the least attempt towards changing your father's determination, or softening his feelings."

"I am glad of it," replied Herbert, gently.

"Do you think my appeal would have been useless?" questioned his mother, anxiously and hesitatingly.

"Well, honestly I do," said the young man, looking tenderly down upon her.

Mrs. Seymour paused, and appeared to think, while a momentary flush overspread her cheeks. When she spoke again, her voice trembled a little, though scarcely perceptible.

"I fear you are right," she said, despondingly. "But," she added presently, with renewed animation, "as this scheme has fallen to the ground, we must devise some other plan, my dear. In the meantime, I shall be very glad to do what I can for the afflicted man."

Here she took her purse from her pocket, and, before Herbert knew what she was about to do, put a bank-note in his hand. He immediately returned it to her saying,—

"This is not at present needed, my kind mother."

"Nonsense," she answered, hastily. "I know how much you spend upon others, and how little you appropriate to your own use; why, therefore, should I be debarred from assisting you in relieving——"

"But James Gordon is not in absolute want," returned the young man, smiling at her practical notion of assistance; "and if I were to offer him money, he would in all probability indignantly refuse it."

Mrs. Seymour gazed at him in pure astonishment.

"Is he then so proud?" she inquired.

"I should rather call him independent."

"Oh, if that is his character," returned the lady, in a tone of dissatisfaction, "I fear you will not be able to do much for him. Such persons are, I well know, very difficult to deal with."

"The first thing to be done," said Herbert, with sudden energy, "is to try and spare him the pain and humiliation of having his application refused. I will therefore seek him at once, and explain

as gently as possible how matters stand. I only hope," he added to himself, as he seized his hat and gloves, "I shall be in time."

But he was not in time; for when, after a rapid walk, he reached the cottage, gently lifted the latch, and went in, a melancholy picture met his eye.

James Gordon was sitting alone,—his aunt having returned to her own home the night before,—with his elbows resting on the table, his face partially hidden in his hands, and his whole attitude bespeaking solitariness and dejection.

He lifted his head on hearing Herbert's footstep, and immediately rose from his chair, and endeavoured, while murmuring a few inarticulate words of welcome, to assume an appearance of composure.

"I see how it is," said Herbert, after gazing at him with sorrowful interest; and, without another word, he went straight up to him, and fervently wrung his hand.

James Gordon understood and appreciated his delicate sympathy; and, coming as it did so soon after the insult he had received, it caused a sudden and complete revulsion in his mind; releasing him from the tumultuous incoherent thoughts and conflicting reflections and emotions, in which he had been immersed, and enabling him to take a more hopeful view of his unenviable position.

"I regret extremely having exposed you to this annoyance, James; but, when I advised you to apply to my father's agent, I did not anticipate anything of the kind," observed Herbert, at length.

"It is over, sir," answered the man, calmly. "I confess I was grievously disappointed at first, as for many reasons I wished to remain in this neighbourhood. But, of course," he added, humbly, "I must expect to meet with difficulties, as people are naturally inclined to look with suspicion upon those who, after leading a godless life, suddenly profess to become changed characters."

"I am afraid what you say is only too true," said Herbert, gravely; "often, where man accuses, *God* acquits. Now," he continued, in a tone of friendly interest, after a pause, "let us consider some other plan. If I understand you rightly, it is your wish to remain in this neighbourhood?"

"It *was*, sir," he replied, smiling faintly; "but——"

"I am quite sure Sir George Hastings will, at my request, gladly employ you. It would have been better if I had, in the first instance, referred you to him, instead of my father."

"Excuse me, sir," returned the man, firmly; "but I could not on any consideration, be induced to apply to him."

"You need not see him at all," said Herbert, pleasantly. "I will arrange everything for you."

"Indeed, sir, you mistake me," cried James Gordon, eagerly. "Nothing on earth shall tempt me to take advantage of your kindness."

Herbert regarded him attentively for a minute or two, being quite at a loss to understand the cause of his emotion.

"Is it pride that makes you speak thus, James?" he asked, in a voice of gentle reproach. "And to me!"

"No—a thousand times no!" was the emphatic answer. "But, dear Mr. Herbert, do not urge me to take this step. At present *I* am the only sufferer; but if Mr. Seymour were to find out that you had persuaded any of his acquaintances to befriend me, the consequences might be most ruinous to yourself."

He stopped in some embarrassment, and Herbert, for the first time comprehending the motive which prompted him to refuse so advantageous a proposal, was struck with admiration at his unselfishness.

"I hope I shall see you again before I leave," proceeded the man, presently.

Herbert looked at him in surprise, and he added in an explanatory tone,—"I was afraid you might not find it convenient to call again, sir. A week passes away so quickly."

"A week?" interrogated Herbert, quickly.

"Did you not know, sir, that I have received notice to quit this house in a week?"

"Monstrous!" exclaimed the young man, in stifled tones; "I cannot believe it. Are you sure," he demanded, turning to the ill-used man, "that you are not labouring under some misconception?"

"Oh, yes," said James Gordon, a shadow as of a great cloud sweeping over his face for a moment, and then disappearing as swiftly; "Mr. Gibson told me—but I need not repeat his taunting words. I shall be quite ready when the time comes."

A deep, indignant flush sprang to Herbert's brow, and his very lip quivered with suppressed agitation. He made no comment, however,—indeed how could he? Mr. Seymour's conduct was, he felt, inexcusably harsh and ungenerous; but he likewise felt that it was not for him to censure it, or speak of *his father* in any other terms save those of filial respect.

After walking several times, absorbed in anxious thought, up and down the room, he was suddenly inspired by one of those luminous ideas which sometimes flash, we know not how, into the mind, simplifying everything that has hitherto seemed involved in difficulty, and causing us to wonder how we could ever have despaired of accomplishing our purpose.

"James," he said, turning hastily round, so as to get a better view of his face, "after the unkind treatment you have received from my family, can you still look upon me as a friend?"

"You have indeed been a friend to me," replied the man, much moved, "and deeply do I feel the privilege——"

"Then," interrupted Herbert, "perhaps you will not object to give me a proof of your kind feeling."

"I would die for you, sir," he exclaimed, with irrepressible earnestness. And I believe it was no mere figure of speech; *he really meant what he said.*

Herbert could scarcely speak for a minute or two, so totally unprepared was he for such an answer; but at length he proceeded to explain his wishes.

What those wishes were, however, another chapter must inform the reader.

CHAPTER XVII.

HERBERT COTTAGE, AND ITS NEW TENANT.

"Love often draws good for us from our ill,
Skilful to bless us even against our will."

"FIRST of all, James," said Herbert, smiling a little, "I must tell you that when I was quite an infant a distant relation of mine, who is long since dead, presented me on the day of my baptism with a small house which he had just built near the populous town of Lanchester, and humorously named after myself—'Herbert Cottage.' Now, this cottage I have never yet seen, but it has been generally occupied by a respectable tenant until about a year ago, when the last person who rented it left the neighbourhood, and it has since remained empty."

Much James Gordon wondered how this could in any way affect him; but he listened attentively to find out what would come next, and Herbert continued,—"Last week I received a letter from the lawyer who has been in the habit of remitting me the rent, saying that in consequence of its having been so little attended to, the furniture—for I forgot to mention it was fully furnished when presented to me—has become greatly injured, and every part of the cottage is in a sad state of repair. He strongly advises me to get rid of the property altogether, as a large factory is, it appears, about to be erected sufficiently near it to prove a permanent source of annoyance to any one who may happen to reside in it. My own inclination, however, does not lead me to follow his suggestion, and this is why I have resolved to ask your help."

"In what way can I assist you?" inquired his companion, eagerly.

"If you will agree to proceed as soon as you can to Lanchester, and take up your abode in Herbert Cottage until I shall have decided what is best to be done with it, you will do me a real service, for——"

"But sir——" interposed James Gordon.

"In the first place," pursued the young man, quickly, taking no notice of the interruption, "I shall learn from you the exact state of things, which is what I could scarcely expect from a mere stranger. Then, instead of employing an agent to see that the house is put into thorough repair, I should have the satisfaction of knowing that you were on the spot, ready to carry out my instructions, and further my plans by superintending the work, and having everything properly attended to. It must be obvious, even to yourself, that you would in this way be able to render me much and valuable assistance."

While he spoke thus, James Gordon assumed a half-meditative air; and for a brief space he remained quite silent, with his eyes abstractedly fixed upon the ground; but, suddenly raising them to Herbert's face, he remarked, with some shrewdness,—"It appears to me, sir, that your chief object in making this arrangement is to provide me with a temporary home. But to show you," he added in a voice of

touching earnestness, "that I appreciate your kindness, I will accept it as freely as it is offered."

"Many thanks, my good friend," said Herbert, warmly; "you will never, I hope, repent of having acceded to my wishes."

"If I could really in any way be of use to you," returned the other, wistfully, "I should esteem it a great favour."

"You will have a hundred opportunities of serving me, James," rejoined Herbert, cheerfully. "But what troubles you now?" he inquired, observing—after he had entered into a fuller description of his intentions regarding him, and settled with him as to the time and means of his departure—that an uneasy, perplexed look had returned to his face; "what troubles you now, James?"

"Pardon me for putting the question, sir," replied the man,—a shade of embarrassment crossing his swarthy countenance, "but is Mr. Seymour at all connected with this property?"

"Decidedly not," said Herbert, smiling at his evident dread of being brought in contact with that gentleman.

"Then I suppose he never interferes with you in the management of it?"

"Never. It is too insignificant an estate for him to bestow a single thought upon."

This assurance seemed to afford James Gordon considerable relief; and he began at once to evince the liveliest interest in the business with which Herbert was about to entrust him.

"Is it true," said the latter abruptly, as he rose at length to go, "that you have insisted on making over all your mother's little property to her sister?"

"It was the least I could do, sir," answered the man, colouring, "after the kindness and attention she bestowed on my dear mother during her last illness. Besides, if I had not returned just when I did, she would, of course, have been entitled to everything, and I could not endure the thought of depriving——"

Here he paused and hesitated.

"I can well enter into your motives," said Herbert, feelingly; "they do you honour, James."

Pleasure, humility, and gratitude beamed in the man's face, as he listened to these few words of commendation from the lips of the one whose approval he most desired to gain.

After bidding him good-morning, Herbert turned hastily round, when in the act of quitting the house, and remarked lightly,—"Perhaps I may pay you a short visit as soon as you are comfortably established at Lanchester, and have had the house put into tolerable repair; then I shall be better able to decide as to the expediency of retaining it in my possession."

James Gordon's eyes lighted up with real pleasure, and in a few emphatic sentences he expressed his satisfaction at the prospect thus presented to him of again having the privilege of holding communion with his much-valued friend.

Herbert had several other visits to pay that morning; in consequence of which he was unable to return to Mertonsville in time for luncheon. This, however, did not trouble him, as it was always a very irregular meal, and one at which Mr. Seymour seldom appeared, unless, as sometimes happened, the party—usually consisting of the friends with whom his wife had been driving or spending the morning

—was augmented by guests who were, in his own estimation, worthy of being distinguished by more than ordinary marks of politeness and attention. It was therefore with feelings of astonishment that Herbert learnt from a servant, who met him as he was crossing the hall on his way to his mother's private sittting-room, where he expected to find her, that she was not there, Mr. Seymour having joined her at luncheon, and afterwards accompanied her to the drawing-room.

Accordingly the young man bent his steps thither.

As he opened the door, he perceived that his father and mother were alone. The former—standing on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, his fine figure drawn up to its fullest extent, and his face stern and determined—was speaking in a voice both authoritative and inflexible; while Mrs. Seymour, sitting on a sofa very near him, remained silent and motionless, listening to his words with downcast eyes and a heightened colour; although a casual observer might have supposed her to be wholly absorbed in watching the movements of Roselle—her favourite little Blenheim spaniel, who occupied a pink satin cushion at her feet.

For the space of half a second, Herbert felt strongly disposed—seeing his presence was not suspected by either of them—softly to reclose the door and withdraw; but then he remembered that by doing this he would be exposing his mother to additional discomfort; and he considered himself bound, alike by duty and inclination, to consult her pleasure before his own, and protect her as much as he possibly could from the slightest shadow of vexation or annoyance.

Consequently, without waiting for further deliberation, he entered the room, and, after closing the door somewhat noisily behind him, advanced to the upper end of it, and seated himself near Mrs. Seymour's sofa, where he stooped to caress the beautiful dog, who sprang from its comfortable cushion at his approach, and manifested such unequivocal marks of delight at seeing him, as were compatible with its canine disposition.

This unpremeditated act saved him the embarassment of encountering the keen searching gaze with which he instinctively felt Mr. Seymour was regarding him, and also gave him an opportunity of deciding what course he ought to pursue, should his father make any inquiries relative to his morning's occupation. The latter, however, had no intention of addressing him at all; for, after steadily watching him for a minute or two, he moved a step nearer his wife, and said slowly and distinctly,—

"I am now going to ascertain whether the orders I have given are being carried out; in the meantime you will, perhaps, have the goodness to inform your son of our arrangements, so that we may not be delayed at the last moment."

Mrs. Seymour bent her head in acquiescence, but made no other reply; and firmly and deliberately the gentleman left the apartment.

"*Your* son," repeated Mrs. Seymour, raising her head, and speaking in a tone of more bitterness than Herbert had ever before heard her employ. "My poor Herbert! your father is at last ashamed to own you." And she laughed hysterically.

"My darling mother," said the young man, soothingly—for he was beginning to feel quite alarmed at this sudden change in her usually placid demeanour—"you surely will not allow such a trifle to distress you."

"I cannot look upon it as a trifle," she answered presently, with visible agitation of manner, which she strove in vain to suppress; "and, perhaps, if you had heard the cruel hint he let drop when I ventured to express my approbation of your conduct, you would agree with me in supposing——"

"I know it all," said Herbert, gently; "for some time I have suspected that my father would not be content to remain passive much longer."

Mrs. Seymour gave a repressed shudder.

"But why should we anticipate evil?" continued Herbert, desirous of diverting her attention: "to-day's burden is quite enough for us to bear, without attempting to-morrow's also."

"True," returned his mother, with a sigh which would not be restrained

"*Apropos* of this," he went on smilingly "were you not going to apprise me of some arrangement?"

"Oh, yes!" interrupted the lady, rousing herself, and speaking in a quick, hurried voice; "I forgot to mention that your father insists on our spending a week or two at Belmont Manor"—the seat of Sir William Crossley, twenty miles distant—"before the arrival of our Christmas visitors."

"Is not that a very sudden resolve?" asked Herbert, in surprise.

"Yes: only a few days ago I wrote to Lady Crossley, and, with his entire concurrence, declined her invitation: but she and her husband have been here this morning, and—in short," (this was added in a tone of resignation,) "we must submit."

"And when are we expected to be there?" questioned the young man, mustering firmness to repress every outward manifestation of the real disappointment her information had caused him.

"This evening."

"So soon!" exclaimed Herbert, starting from his seat; "then I fear I must leave you for half an hour. I ought to write several letters before we start."

"Just one word before you go," said Mrs. Seymour, arresting him. "Have you discovered any way of being of use to James Gordon? But perhaps you had better not tell me," she added, hastily checking herself, "for I have no wish to betray you, and——"

"You fear lest my father should again refer to him," suggested her son, looking thoughtful.

"I do," she answered, in a low tone; "for when he first missed you from the house, he seemed very restless and uneasy; and spoke of the advisability of preventing you from having any further intercourse with the poor man."

"Ah!" cried Herbert, with a half-visible smile, "this is the real reason for our going to Belmont Manor. How exceedingly fortunate," he continued softly to himself, "that everything is already arranged!"

"Well, at first," said Mrs. Seymour, who did not hear his concluding words, "I was inclined to entertain a similar opinion; but a moment's reflection showed me that a week or two could make very little material change in your feelings; and therefore your father must, of course, be aware that you would, on your return——"

"Find James Gordon gone," observed Herbert, quietly.

"Why should he be gone?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, quickly.

"I spoke unguardedly," said Herbert, finding himself in rather an embarrassing position; for he had wished to spare her the pain of hearing of the stringent measures which her husband had thought proper to adopt in order to banish James Gordon from the neighbourhood. But, Mrs. Seymour's suspicions having been once aroused, this evasive reply could not satisfy her; and after a minute's serious thought, Herbert considered it better to explain to her how matters stood, instead of leaving her to form her own conclusions, which, in the present apprehensive state of her mind, would most probably prove more unfavourable than the reality.

Not long, however, did he dwell upon the dark side of the picture, his object being to enlist her sympathies and awaken her interest in the fortunes of his humble friend—the depth and genuineness of whose reformation he had never once doubted—without adverting, save in the briefest and gentlest manner, to the unkind treatment he had received from Mr. Seymour.

And he succeeded; for, though Mrs. Seymour stopped him when, forgetful of her desire to remain in ignorance of his plans and purposes, he was proceeding to make a *confidante* of her, yet the little she heard yielded her relief and satisfaction.

As soon as possible after accomplishing this desirable end Herbert retired to write his letters. One of these, which, when finished, he addressed to James Gordon, contained a recapitulation of his wishes, and also the necessary funds for carrying them out, together with a few lines to the lawyer who had hitherto taken charge of the property.

This done, he went in search of Lisburn, to whom he entrusted the packet, requesting him to give it into James Gordon's own hands that same evening.

An hour or two later Mr. Seymour's elegant travelling-carriage, with its six handsome bay horses, swept through the hamlet of Mertonsville, and, taking the road which led to Belmont Manor, was soon out of sight.

Before the expiration of another week James Gordon had taken up his abode, *pro tem.*, at Herbert Cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HERBERT DARES TO DISOBEY.

"To live by law,
Acting the law we live by, without fear;
And, because right is right, to follow right."

NOTHING worthy of being recorded occurred while the Seymours remained at Belmont Manor; but Herbert, with his quick, intuitive perceptions, felt convinced that a crisis in his history was fast approaching.

Mr. Seymour appeared wrapped in a cloud of impenetrable gloom, or plunged in a state of uncontrollable and restless impatience, whenever he found himself in his son's more immediate presence; although in his intercourse with others he was the same as ever—polite, courteous, and gentlemanly.

At the expiration of a fortnight, Mrs. Seymour much wished to return to Mertonsville, but her hostess prevailed on her to remain another week, as she was very desirous of securing her presence at a splendid ball she proposed giving in honour of her eldest son, who had just attained his majority.

If left entirely to herself, it is probable that—for Herbert's sake—Mrs. Seymour would still have insisted on going home. A few calmly decisive words, however, spoken by her resolute husband, were sufficient to induce her gracefully to yield to Lady Crossley's wishes; and, this step taken, she forthwith strove to banish from her mind every reflection which might be calculated to render her unhappy, and obliterate all her past sober thoughts and gloomy foreshadowings, by entering heart and soul into her friend's project.

For two successive weeks Herbert's little flock at Mertonsville had met together, and held a prayer-meeting among themselves; but as the third approached, the young preacher felt a great desire to take his accustomed place in their midst.

Accordingly, on the morning of the day on which they usually assembled, Herbert was considering how he should announce his intention to Lady Crossley, when he accidently met her as he was traversing the intricate passages on his way to one of the sitting-rooms.

"I am just going to inspect the arrangements which have been made in the ball-room," she said, smilingly accosting him: "will you accompany me?"

"With great pleasure," responded her guest, delighted to have an opportunity of speaking to her alone.

"A *coup d'œil* will enable us to judge of the general effect," continued the lady, pausing inside the door, and looking complacently around her. "What is your opinion, Mr. Herbert?—shall we have a pleasant ball?"

"I feel myself quite incapable of answering that question," replied the young man, thoughtfully, almost sadly, gazing about him, and

picturing to himself the richly dressed throng of fair young creatures, with glowing cheeks, bright eyes, laughing lips, and graceful, sylph-like forms, who would that very night be gaily circling round the magnificently decorated room—woman's beauty blended with manhood's strength; all eagerly pursuing the evasive shadows of earthly happiness.

Lady Crossley regarded him with a face of suppressed amazement.

"I should be at a loss to comprehend such an ambiguous answer," she said presently, "had I not heard it whispered that you have conceived a dislike for dancing."

Herbert smiled.

"I wish you would tell me what you see objectionable in it," pursued the lady, after considering him attentively for a few seconds. "*I* have always been accustomed to look upon it as a very innocent amusement."

"It is not the mere exercise of dancing that I object to——"

"I am glad to hear you say so, for it would really distress me were you to desert us to-night."

A slight shade passed across Herbert's face, and for an instant he hesitated; then he spoke with gravity, gentleness, and firmness.

"I was about to add," he said, "that, however harmless dancing may be in itself, it leads to much evil, and is, in my opinion, a very unsuitable amusement for professing Christians."

"Why do you lay such evident stress upon these words? Are we not all professing Christians?"

"In one sense no doubt we are; but the class I more particularly allude to are those who, professing to have become new creatures in Christ Jesus, love Him supremely, and seek and find their happiness in Him, and Him alone. I appeal to yourself; is not the *conduct* of such at variance with their *profession* when they join in the sinful vanities and frivolities of a pleasure-loving world?"

"I am so ignorant on these matters," answered the lady, with a sigh, which she skilfully disguised in a smile.

"At any rate, you will, I am sure, admit that it would be cowardly (to use no stronger expression) for a person holding the views I have mentioned, to suffer himself to be persuaded into following practices which he condemns in his heart, merely from the dread of meeting with ridicule or being accused of singularity."

"Certainly," replied Lady Crossley, her lip curling scornfully; "I have ever been a lover of truth, and should despise any one who was so lamentably deficient in moral courage."

"I knew it," exclaimed Herbert, earnestly, a flush of pleasure rising to his brow as he advanced a step nearer the lady, with a smile of unconcealed triumph; "I knew that you would despise me if I——"

"You?" she cried, looking at him in surprise. "Oh, I understand it now," she added immediately afterwards, playfully shaking her head at him; "if I had only known what a schemer you are, I should not thus unsuspectingly have given expression to my sentiments."

"I am very glad you spoke so plainly," returned Herbert, in a tone of deep feeling; "for I am encouraged to hope that you will be neither offended nor surprised at my non-appearance here to-night."

Lady Crossley instantly became serious. "Then it is really your wish," she said, in a grave, pondering tone, as if she were carefully considering her words, "to take no part whatever in this ball."

Herbert bowed assent.

His companion looked down thoughtfully for a moment, and then remarked, "I fear your mother will be disappointed."

"She is too kind and generous to blame me," said the young man, eagerly.

"But Mr. Seymour?—he is no doubt kind and generous too; yet, still——" And there she paused, as if unwilling to speak further.

"My father knows that I am in the habit of absenting myself from such scenes; he will not therefore expect to see me."

"Well, I suppose I must submit," rejoined the lady, not without a little reluctance.

"Accept my warmest thanks," said Herbert, gently; adding musingly, as if speaking to himself, "this will enable me to keep my engagement."

"So you have another engagement!" exclaimed Lady Crossley, in a tone not altogether free from pique.

"Yes," answered the other, quickly, "but it is of a very different nature." Then, seeing that she was still looking far from satisfied, he resolved on explaining to her his real intentions.

On the whole, it would have been well-nigh impossible for him to have adopted a wiser course; the Lady Crossley was a woman of keen penetration and strong prejudices, and any attempt at deception on Herbert's part would have ruined him entirely in her estimation; whereas she was quite captivated by the frankness and consideration with which he treated her, and half inclined to conclude that he must be right in everything he did and said, so favourably was she impressed by his aspect, manner, and straightforward sincerity; his manly, yet gentle dignity, the thoughtful, but not sad—grave, but not stern—expression of his countenance; the clear, dark eye, which looked so thoughtfully into her own; the sweet winning smile, which played occasionally on his handsome lip; his studious avoidance of all those trifling, conventional, complimentary, or superficially polite phrases, which so often—to her secret disgust—she was obliged to listen to; and, lastly, though not the least in importance, she was touched and gratified exceedingly by the confidence he reposed in her individually, and the quickness and keensightedness of his judgment, in discerning and adapting himself to the peculiarities of her character. To much that he said during the conversation that followed, her heart almost unconsciously responded; and more than once, in the course of the day, she caught herself meditating upon his words with unwonted seriousness and earnest interest.

After a while they left the ball-room together; but Lady Crossley having occasion to return to it, in order to point out some alteration which she wished made to a servant whom they met, Herbert was left to pursue his own way alone. He had only proceeded a few steps when a door just in front of him was noiselessly opened, and Mr. Seymour's tall figure appeared on the threshold.

The young man would have passed on, but by an imperative gesture his father motioned to him to stop. He obeyed, greatly wondering that the latter should thus condescend to address him spontaneously. Wonder, however, was exchanged for a far deeper feeling, when, after pausing for an instant, Mr. Seymour came close up to him, and said, with a certain slowness, distinctness, and significance of speech which proclaimed his decision to be irrevocable,—

"I have a particular reason for desiring you to be present at this ball to-night; moreover, I lay my positive commands on you, not only to show yourself when there, but also to dance.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Herbert, thrown off his guard.

"You should know by this time," proceeded the other in the aforesaid tone, and with a stern compression of his upper lip, "that I am not to be trifled with. Having explained my wishes, I expect them to be carried out. I tell you, therefore, once for all, that in this thing *I will be obeyed.*"

Without another word he moved haughtily away, and re-entered the room he had so recently quitted; while Herbert, upon whose heart a heavy load had suddenly fallen, rapidly sought his own apartment, where he remained for a considerable time a prey to the most painful and conflicting emotions. He could not all at once bring himself to view the matter calmly and dispassionately, or subdue the natural feeling of indignation which Mr. Seymour's irritating words and still more irritating tones had kindled within him. But by-and-by a gentler mood succeeded, and he was enabled to reflect upon what had passed without a vestige of anger or bitterness.

His sense of duty was too strong and conclusive for him to hesitate for a moment as to what course he should adopt. Still, it was with extreme regret that he prepared to disobey his father's commands.

"However, I cannot do otherwise," he murmured half aloud; "for, though I am well aware that worldliness consists rather in a heart which draws its support and satisfaction from earthly things than in those things themselves; yet it is no less my duty to abstain from all appearance of evil, and show forth the praises of Him who has called me out of darkness into His marvellous light, by acting up to the earnest injunction, 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'"

The short day was fast drawing to a close when Mr. Seymour, who happened to be seated at a large bay window in one of the principal apartments overlooking the broad avenue, saw his son leave the house; and, after looking hastily around him as if he had expected to meet some one, he glanced at his watch, and then started off at a rapid pace in the direction of the stables. Before he had gone far, he was met by a groom bringing up his horse; and, without losing a moment, the young man vaulted into the saddle, and was presently out of sight.

"Where can he be going?" was Mr. Seymour's mental exclamation. "Is it possible that he will be mad enough to defy me?"

"Did you speak, Seymour?" inquired a gentleman standing near him; for he had unconsciously repeated the last words aloud.

"I was merely speculating on the weather," he answered, smoothing his ruffled brow, and speaking with the utmost carelessness.

"Ah! it does look somewhat unsettled. Shall we have rain or snow?"

"Probably the latter," returned Mr. Seymour, preparing to leave the window.

With slow and measured steps he crossed the room, until he reached the sofa which was occupied by his wife, who seemed to be greatly amused by listening to the playful sallies of a group of young people near, and leaning towards her, asked in a low tone, fixing his eyes at the same time searchingly upon her face,—

"Can you tell me what has become of Herbert?"

"No," she replied, glancing uneasily around the room. And she said truly; for the young man had purposely refrained from speaking to her on the subject. "But what makes you ask?" she demanded—in indistinct dread of hearing something unpleasant. "Surely——"

"Pray do not alarm yourself," rejoined her husband, in a dry, caustic voice, while a sarcastic smile wreathed his lips; "I have just seen him ride away from the house, and I merely wished to discover whether, before going, he had condescended to explain his intentions to you."

"His intentions?" questioned the lady, looking surprised.

"I mean, of course, regarding the ball—will he return in time for it?"

Mrs. Seymour shook her head. "You know, my dear," she said deprecatingly, "he does not consider it right for him to join us at these times."

"Yes, and I also know," began Mr. Seymour, in a hissing whisper; but before he could complete his sentence, Lady Crossley approached them, saying gaily,—

"My dear Mrs. Seymour, I promised your maid to remind you that it is getting late; she is beginning to fear you will not be dressed in time."

Then, turning to the gentleman, she observed with a frank smile, "You must not be angry with me for giving your excellent son permission to leave us for a few hours. I should scarcely have agreed to dispense with his society had I not suspected that, however much *we* may regret his absence, there are others who will gain infinitely more than we lose by it."

Mr. Seymour's face darkened as he listened to her words; but in no other way did he allow himself to betray the least symptom of annoyance or dissatisfaction and when she had finished he resumed his accustomed manner, and uttered a few words in reply, after which his wife and Lady Crossley passed out of the room together.

CHAPTER XIX.

PRAYING AND WORKING.

"'Tis infamy to die and not be missed."

So habitual and perfect was the command Mr. Seymour exercised over himself, that no one who had observed him at Lady Crossley's ball on the occasion referred to in my last chapter, could have surmised the true state of his feelings.

Even Mrs. Seymour was deceived into believing him, if not wholly satisfied, at least indifferent, as to Herbert's movements—*ergo* her own spirits, which had been somewhat depressed by the harshness of his manner, when speaking to her on the subject, became unusually elevated; and she afterwards assured her hostess that she had enjoyed herself most thoroughly.

Her anxiety was, however, reawakened when, at a late hour, the party met at breakfast; and she glanced furtively from Herbert to Mr. Seymour, and *vice versa*, several times during the lengthened meal, hoping to gain thus indirectly some insight into their mutual condition.

But, notwithstanding her earnest scrutiny, she was unable to arrive at any definite conclusion; for though she fancied that Herbert looked pale, thoughtful, and slightly embarrassed, his father's features could scarcely have been more immovably calm had they been composed of chiselled marble.

Neither did she elicit much information from Herbert, although she closely interrogated him the first time she had an opportunity, regarding this short interview with Mr. Seymour. The young man, being as yet uncertain what results might spring from the step he had considered it his duty to take, preferred saying as little as possible about it, lest he should excite her fears; and he accordingly contrived adroitly to evade her questions, without adding to her solicitude, or increasing her apprehensive perplexities.

As days and weeks wore away before Mr. Seymour made any further allusion to the circumstance, it almost appeared as if he had forgotten, or more properly speaking (for he *never* forgot an injury) forgiven, his son's disobedience.

Herbert, however, did not for a moment indulge so vain a hope; he felt that he had deeply—perhaps irremediably—offended his father, and that this continued silence was portentous of evil rather than good.

Meanwhile, Christmas, with its delightful associations, its softening, enlarging, and elevating influences, its pleasant reunions and happy social gatherings, came and went, and Mrs. Seymour, in daily expection of hearing her husband express a wish to proceed to their house in Belgrave Square, began to make preparations for leaving Mertonsville.

One clear frosty Sabbath evening, about this time, Mr. Seymour and several gentlemen who had been dining with him passed through the village on their way to a friend's house, where they had agreed

to spend the few remaining hours of the sacred day. An empty carriage slowly followed them, for the coldness of the weather made them prefer walking to driving; and as they went on they remarked with some surprise the perfect quiet which surrounded them on all sides.

"Really, Seymour," exclaimed Mr. Hilton, laughing good-humouredly, "you deserve great credit for keeping your tenants in such excellent order. Not one straggler can I see," he added, pausing and gazing curiously around him; "and better still, not one harsh, discordant sound is to be heard."

"Very true," responded Colonel Fowler, an irascible old gentleman, between whom and Mr. Seymour there had for years existed an unacknowledged feeling of hostility, principally arising from their being invariably opposed to each other in politics. "It is inimitable. But I rather suspect our friend here would not have accomplished so much had he not possessed a valuable auxiliary in the person of his son."

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired Mr. Seymour, quite calmly, though with a certain lowering of the brow and flashing of the eye. "I have yet to learn that *my* tenants differ in any respect from your own."

"Indeed, Seymour, there is a very considerable difference," interposed Sir George Hastings, with thoughtful seriousness. "I have often been amazed at the civil, orderly, respectful, and I may add refined manners of the generality of your workpeople, when contrasted with the rough, unpolished beings I have the misfortune to employ."

This was by no means so distasteful to Mr. Seymour, and had he not still been smarting under Colonel Fowler's words, he would probably have taken it as a personal compliment; but the idea of hearing Herbert's name thus mentioned in connection with *his* dependants was wormwood to his proud spirit.

"With such an example before us," continued Sir George, "we are, I think, doubly culpable in not adopting measures to improve the moral condition of our own numerous *employés*."

"Why, what would you have us do for them?" demanded Mr. Hilton, in rather a disdainful tone.

"Could we not try the same plan which has been so successfully followed here?" suggested Sir George.

"*Imprimis*," returned the other, with a countenance of polite incredulity, "perhaps you will afford us a little information regarding the plan itself. I, for one, am profoundly ignorant of everything concerning it."

"Behold, then, its principal features!" exclaimed Colonel Fowler, in a voice of mock solemnity; and as he spoke, he stopped in his walk, and pointed with an air of mystery to the large unpretending-looking edifice we have several times before had occasion to mention, to which they had just approached without being aware that it was at that very moment occupied by the greater proportion of the inhabitants of Mertonsville.

"You speak in riddles," commented Mr. Hilton; but he suddenly paused, and exchanged a swift glance with Sir George Hastings, as a voice, which he instantly knew to be that of Herbert Seymour, vibrated upon his ear.

A dead silence succeeded; for Mr. Seymour, who had also recognised his son's voice, stood as if rooted to the spot, with his lips tightly compressed together, and his eyes staring vacantly through the nearest window.

Colonel Fowler keenly watched his proceedings, smiling grimly meanwhile, although, to do him justice, his sentiments would have undergone a speedy transition had any one hinted to him the possibility of Herbert's suffering from this accidental and, as himself thought, amusing discovery.

Sir George Hastings' eyes, too, were fixed upon Mr. Seymour's face, but with a very different expression; for he hoped to see some symptom of relenting, some token whereby he might conclude that his cold heart was softened and touched.

He hoped in vain!

After waiting just long enough to hear Herbert read in clear melodious tones, such as rendered every word distinctly audible to those without, the first verse of that well-known hymn—

> "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
> In a believer's ear," etc.,

and commence a simple tune, in which he was immediately joined by the others, the worldly father, without one thrill of emotion, moved wrathfully away, muttering between his closed teeth,—

"This shall be put a stop to!"

"Would it not be well for us to change our purpose?" inquired Colonel Fowler, maliciously. "It strikes me that we shall be better employed here;" and he made a feint of returning to the door of the building.

"Fowler, beware what you do!" said Sir George Hastings, hastily drawing him aside, and speaking in an impressive whisper: "I know you are always rejoiced to have an opportunity of entering into a disputation with my friend Seymour; but I do not imagine you would wilfully injure his son."

"Injure! How?" exclaimed the other, in astonishment.

"I will explain my meaning at some future time. In the meanwhile pray introduce another subject on which to converse."

Thus saying, he rejoined Mr. Seymour, and did not again leave his side until they arrived at their destination. Before they parted for the night he made an earnest endeavour to convince him of the folly of attempting to change Herbert's opinions, and represented to him the mutual and irreparable disjunction which would be the inevitable consequence of his inducing him—even if he succeeded in doing so—to yield a forced obedience to his will.

"In my opinion," continued the kind-hearted man, "you ought to feel proud rather than ashamed of the position your son occupies."

"Proud!" repeated Mr. Seymour, bitterly. "Oh, yes! I have indeed reason to be *proud* of him."

"You must not forget, my dear Seymour——"

"Say no more, Hastings," returned the gentleman, in rather an agitated voice. "We have been friends from our earliest childhood, and I should not wish the bond, which has existed so long, to be snapped asunder now. Such, however, would, I fear, be the case, were we to pursue this matter further; for I will candidly confess to you that it is a subject on which I cannot speak without losing my temper."

Sir George shook his head gravely. "I feel you are wrong," he said, in a tone of gentle decision; "but, of course, I have no right to dictate to you how to act."

"You have the right of warm and long-continued friendship," said Mr. Seymour, recovering his wonted urbanity, and frankly extending his hand, which the other as frankly took; "and that is a claim I should be the very last to dispute."

And thus the subject was dropped.

All unconscious of what had occurred, Herbert bent his steps homeward at the conclusion of the service, reflecting deeply upon the glorious truths he had so lately been proclaiming. Everything else appeared so insignificant to him at that moment. *Earth*, with its ten thousand beauties, its fair landscapes, its hills and its valleys, verdant glades and flowing streams, fragrant flowers and sunny skies; *life*, with its manifold privileges and responsibilities, its joys and sorrows, smiles and tears, hopes and fears; health, strength, wealth, youth, friends, and pleasure,—*all* seemed as nothing, when contrasted for an instant with the "eternal weight of glory" which remains for God's redeemed children in heaven.

"Is my father within?" was his first question on entering the house.

"No, sir," answered the servant. "It is nearly two hours since he went out."

"And my mother?"

"She is alone in the drawing-room."

Herbert took a few steps in that direction, and then altering his mind, he turned round, and said, "Before going to her, I will meet any of you who may feel disposed to join me in the library."

The man understood him perfectly; for he quickly disappeared, and a minute or two afterwards returned, followed by a number of the other servants, who, Bibles in hand, took their seats, and listened with marked attention while Herbert read and explained a few verses from the sacred volume, closing the simple service with a brief though fervent prayer.

Then they retired as quietly as they had assembled; and the young man remained for a short time alone, until he was informed that Mrs. Seymour expected him at tea.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting," he said, as he seated himself beside her.

"Oh, no," she answered, smilingly, handing him a cup of tea, "but I feared you would be tired; and, indeed," she added, gazing anxiously in his face, "you are looking quite exhausted—what have you been doing?"

"Nothing more than usual," returned Herbert, cheerfully.

Mrs. Seymour shook her head doubtingly. "It is very evident to me that you attempt too much, Herbert; your cheeks are becoming thinner and paler every day."

The young man tried to convince her that she was mistaken; but he did not, as he might have done, explain to her that if any alteration had taken place in his appearance, it was the result, not of overwork, but of the painful state of agitating suspense in which his father's morose and unnatural conduct had so perpetually kept him of late.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. SEYMOUR DRIVES MATTERS TO EXTREMITY.

"I dare not choose my lot:
I would not, if I might." BONAR.

SOON after breakfast the following morning Herbert received a message from Mr. Seymour, commanding his presence in the library. He was scarcely surprised at this; for his father's manner had led him to expect it; but now that the long-looked-for moment had arrived, which would in all probability essentially affect his whole future prospects, his heart throbbed violently, and he proceeded to obey the summons, instinctively feeling that the conference would not be a pleasant one, and filled with deep anxiety as to the result.

Mr. Seymour was seated at his writing-table when the young man entered the library; but he instantly laid down his pen, and, after motioning him to a chair, opened the conversation by saying in a tone of unbending authority,—

"It would be superfluous for me to enter into any useless explanation of my motive in requesting your attendance here this morning, as it must be obvious even to yourself that it is quite time for us to come to a mutual and unequivocal understanding."

Herbert had nothing to say in answer to this, therefore he remained silent.

"You may probably remember," continued Mr. Seymour—and there was a sneer discernible on his countenance—"that when you first did me the honour of making known to me your altered views, I frankly expressed my disapprobation of the course you proposed adopting, and advised you to reconsider your determination."

"Yes, I remember it well," said Herbert, as he paused for an answer.

"And yet, so far from respecting my wishes, you have ever since that time been acting in direct opposition to them! Instead of accommodating yourself to my well-known habits and pursuits, you have established new customs and introduced new practices, without even going through the form of consulting me on the subject. You have also been guilty of unauthorised interference in my own private affairs, by so unwarrantably assuming the management and guidance of my tenants."

"Pardon me," replied Herbert, astonished beyond measure at such an extraordinary accusation; "my conscience acquits me of any culpability in this respect; I have never by word or deed sought to interfere——"

"Your conscience!" repeated Mr. Seymour, significantly; "does it not sometimes remind you of the duty you owe your parents?"

"It is my sincere desire to afford you satisfaction," said Herbert, mildly; "and I am most anxious to obey your commands whenever——"

"It suits you to do so!" impatiently interrupted Mr. Seymour.

"But enough of this," he continued after a pause; "it is the future, not the past, of which I would speak."

He rose; and having thrice paced the apartment without taking any further notice of his son, stopped at length in front of him, and, fixing his eyes sternly upon his face, proceeded in a tone of unmistakable bitterness,—"Perhaps you do not know that you are the talk of the whole neighbourhood; and your Quixotic plan of trying to reform all those with whom you come in contact, is greatly ridiculed by your friends. Indeed, some of them have, in my hearing, gone so far as to question whether you are altogether in your right mind."

Herbert's cheek grew a shade paler than usual; but he ventured no remark; and his father went on with increased asperity,—

"Now is this to be continued? Are you still resolved to lay yourself open to such malevolent observations? Because *if so*, it only remains for me to pronounce my decision."

"My dear father," said Herbert, in his gentlest tones, "you place me in a very painful position; for, though I would most gladly sacrifice everything else to gain your approbation, I dare not endanger my own safety by seeking the praise of men. I must look higher."

"I wish you would look higher!" exclaimed Mr. Seymour, wrathfully, "and not degrade yourself by mixing with the lower orders in the way you do. Really it appears to me that you prefer *their* society to that of your equals! Look higher indeed! it is just what I want you to do."

"Father, you mistake me," said Herbert. "I mean that it is my duty to look above the approbation of the world to that of God Himself. What would it signify to me at the last solemn hour, whether my actions had been applauded by men or not?"

"In other words, you wish, I presume, to intimate that you are still obstinately bent on pursuing your own ridiculous practices, regardless of the consequences."

This was said with such marked and provoking emphasis that Herbert involuntarily raised his eyes inquiringly to his father's face.

"Am I right, sir?" demanded that gentleman, sharply.

"Will you not first tell me what part of my conduct appears to you particularly objectionable?" asked Herbert, gently; "for if I can in any way meet your views, without infringing upon the sacred obligations I owe to the King of kings, I will do so."

"It is not *one* thing, but *everything* that displeases me," returned the unreasonable man.

"I am indeed unfortunate," said Herbert, mournfully.

"For months," continued Mr. Seymour, in an aggrieved tone, "you have been a perpetual thorn in my side, disgracing the name you bear, and giving me abundant cause to feel ashamed of possessing such a son. But," he proceeded with suddenly awakened passion, "I will submit to your caprices no longer; you shall either agree to my terms, in which case, I need scarcely inform you, I am ready to forget all that has passed, and treat you with the affection and consideration you have until lately received from me; or——" He paused for a moment, and paced the floor again with stern compressed lips and knitted brow, appearing to forget his son's presence.

In the interim Herbert took a rapid mental survey of his unpleasant position. He felt, from the tone his father assumed, that it

would be as easy to remove a mountain from its base as to conciliate him, except by agreeing to all his unrighteous demands; and, much as he longed for peace, he dared not purchase it at such a price. Wishing, therefore, to know the worst at once, he said, accosting Mr. Seymour in a firm voice, though his lip trembled a little,—

"If the terms you allude to should be such as I cannot conscientiously submit to, what alternative do you propose?"

Harsh, despotic, and unaccustomed as he was to be checked or thwarted in anything on which he had fixed his desire, Mr. Seymour's face became overcast with a black, sullen cloud, as Herbert asked the simple question, and, for the space of a few seconds, anger and surprise rendered him silent and motionless. When he recovered his self-command, he replied, in a voice of suppressed rage, a wintry smile curling his thin lip,—

"Yes; it is quite fitting that you should be told what to expect, in the event of your continuing to resist my authority. Know, then, that, after much and serious thought, I have resolved on allowing you a fortnight in which to ponder my words: if, at the expiration of that time, you agree to carry out my wishes, well and good; if, on the contrary, you are still bent on defying me, I shall—availing myself of the power I fortunately possess—take immediate steps to nullify any documents which may have been executed in your favour, and regard you from henceforth as a stranger instead of a son. Nay, more; I will hold no further intercourse, either direct or indirect, with you; the same roof shall not cover us; and, as far as *I* am concerned, you will be virtually dead."

Herbert listened with acute suffering to this cruel and unfeeling address; and, for some minutes after Mr. Seymour had ceased speaking, the words continued to ring in his ears. His emotion was too vehement for him to feel himself capable of making any reply; but he lifted a long, earnest, beseeching, appealing glance to his father's face; then, sighing deeply, as if convinced that he had indeed heard aright, he sadly withdrew his eyes, and, rising slowly from his seat, turned to leave the room.

"Stay one moment," said Mr. Seymour; and for the first time during the interview the proud aspect of his countenance softened.

Herbert stood still.

"Do not allow yourself to be biassed by any false notions of duty or principle; for your present duty consists, I believe, in following the course I have suggested. And you must remember what you have to choose between—a clear income of £20,000 a year or beggary! Few would hesitate a moment how to act under such circumstances; and if you are wise, you will not reject the offer I have made you. Now go," he added, taking the young man's hand almost affectionately in his own, and speaking in a voice of unwonted kindness; "reflect coolly and dispassionately upon my words, and this day fortnight come to tell me your decision."

Herbert bowed his assent to this arrangement, and with a swelling heart left his father's presence.

It was not the mere prospect of being deprived of his natural inheritance which so powerfully affected him, although *that* to a young man accustomed to all the luxuries and elegancies of life would be a subject fraught with no little anxiety; neither was he influenced by the slightest shadow of anger or resentment at the unreasonable

despotism of Mr Seymour's manner, or his cold, authoritative language. But he was startled and grieved exceedingly when he reflected upon the probability of his becoming an alien from his father's house—banished from the home he loved so well— a stranger to his father—separated from a mother to whom he was passionately attached—and cut off from all those means of usefulness which he prized so highly, and in which he had found so much delight and spiritual edification.

It was in truth a dreary prospect, and one that filled him with the keenest anguish, whenever, and in whatever light, he viewed it.

As days passed away, and the tumult of conflicting thoughts subsided, he endeavoured to arrange and concentrate his ideas as much as possible, in order to form a just estimate of the difficulties attendant upon his peculiar situation, and decide on the course he ought to pursue.

For a time the path of duty seemed plainly marked out before him, and he felt that he must unhesitatingly follow it; but gradually a change came over him, and he began to ask himself whether it was really required of him to remain so rigdily firm in rejecting his father's advice—whether indeed he might not, by yielding a slight concession now, without in any way compromising one iota of Christian principle—be the means of accomplishing untold good in the neighbourhood, and even instrumental in the conversion of Mr. Seymour himself; whereas by—— But we will not accompany him through the labyrinthine train of arguments into which, during this brief period of probation, he suffered himself to be drawn.

Those of my readers who have in their own personal experience known anything of the warfare between the flesh and the spirit, and been tempted like Bunyan's pilgrim to exchange a rough and tedious road for a smooth, pleasant, and easy one—to call inclination *duty*, and the promptings of the natural heart *wisdom*—can scarcely be surprised that Herbert's doubts and perplexities increased each day, until, wearied, by useless and contending thoughts, his courage failed, his resolution wavered, his feet were almost gone—*almost*, for he had reason to say with David, "When my foot slipped, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

The fortnight had nearly expired before his hour of extremity drew nigh. Temptations in a thousand forms had been incessantly assailing him, and, after unsuccessfully struggling with them, he was about to give up the contest in dismay, when the words came with power to his soul, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

In a moment he perceived his mistake; and, falling upon his knees, he earnestly implored that grace and strength of which he stood so much in need.

Long and fervent was his prayer; but it was not in vain; for he arose at length with heaven's light shining on his brow, and heaven's peace reigning in his heart. The Omnipotent One had breathed the all-powerful words over his tempest-tossed spirit, "Peace, be still;" and immediately the raging of the storm was hushed, and there was a great calm.

CHAPTER XXI.

DISINHERITED.

"Shall I call *you* father?"—*Troilus and Cressida.*

I PASS over Herbert's second interview with Mr. Seymour in comparative silence. It was, to use one comprehensive word, *stormy;* and when at last it came to an end, the young man sought the retirement of his own room, with a thoughtful, absent look, and a very sorrowful heart; after hearing the harshest epithets applied to himself, and terrible denunciations of wrath invoked on his head, by his infuriated father—whom the slightest degree of opposition always rendered more dogged and determined to carry his point.

He could not for some time bring himself to believe that Herbert's resolution was unalterably taken; but when really convinced of this, his indignation was unbounded.

Pride—of which he possessed no inconsiderable share—restrained him from attempting any further means of influencing him; but it did not prevent him from making use of those sharp reproaches and bitter invectives which are at all times so hard to be borne, more especially when we feel them to be thoroughly undeserved.

Trying, however, as this interview undoubtedly was, Herbert knew that a far more painful scene awaited him, for it soon became necessary to apprise Mrs. Seymour of the arrangement which had been so unsatisfactorily concluded between himself and his father; and he was anxious that she should be in some measure prepared for the latter's stern communication by first hearing the truth from him.

Accordingly, he proceeded to execute his self-imposed task; fully alive to the difficulty—almost impossibility—of performing it with calmness and composure; and yet firmly resolved to suppress every outward manifestation of the poignant grief which weighed down his own spirit.

His object was to cheer, not distress; therefore, after explaining to her in a few words his father's determination, he strove to make her forget the approaching separation by speaking hopefully of the future, and dwelling upon the mutual joy they would experience in meeting again, so soon as Mr. Seymour's wrath had subsided.

She listened to his words with pale cheeks and a heavy heart; and when the young man paused—overcome in spite of himself—she turned her head uneasily away, that he might not see how much she suffered, and uttered an irrepressible moan.

"My darling mother!" he said, bending down, and regarding her with a look of unutterable tenderness, "only assure me that you will not grieve for me, and I shall feel comparatively happy."

"How can I help grieving?" she answered, and a glance of fond reproach accompanied her words.

"None are exempt from trial," returned Herbert, gently, "and we must not expect——"

"Was it not enough for me to see you unloved and unappreciated by the one of all others who ought to feel proud of you?" said Mrs.

Seymour, with a sudden change of manner; "and now it seems I am to lose you altogether. What right has your father to separate a mother from her son? I do not see why I should submit to such palpable despotism!"

She covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a paroxysm of tears. Herbert paced the room in extreme perturbation, vexed and dismayed at the wild vehemence of her manner, and unable to trust himself to say more, lest he should aggravate and increase her emotion. His own self-command too, was rapidly deserting him; but after lifting up an earnest cry for help, he felt in his heart that he was strengthened.

Some minutes elapsed.

Mrs. Seymour was still weeping, though more quietly; and Herbert was standing with folded arms, gazing abstractedly into the fire—his fine countenance overcast with a shade of deep gravity—when the door unclosed, and Mr. Seymour entered the room. He looked sullen and moody; and, after silently surveying the scene for a moment, turned on his heel, and walked away, without uttering a word.

His sensations baffle description. On the whole, however, he was not displeased that the unenviable task of imparting intelligence which would, he knew, under any circumstances be received with intense sorrow by Mrs. Seymour, should devolve upon Herbert instead of himself.

Once, indeed, it occurred to him whether *she* might not succeed where he had failed, her loving grief, unconsciously effecting what his threats, menaces, and persuasions had been unable to accomplish; but an instant's reflection convinced him of the fallacy of such a hope, and he proceeded without delay to put his cruel purpose into execution.

His first step was to send off a servant to Dilton, with a telegraph message to be despatched to his lawyer, who resided in London, demanding his immediate presence at Mertonsville; his next to shut himself up in his library, where he sat for hours, looking over and arranging his papers, and making various corrections and alterations in them.

Meanwhile, Herbert still continued to soothe and comfort his afflicted mother, although his own suffering was scarcely less than hers.

"Is there no way," she said at last, putting her hand despairingly to her aching head, "*no way* by which this trial may be averted?"

"None," replied Herbert, in a low, firm voice. "My father will not alter *his* decision, and *I cannot* change mine."

"Could you not make some unimportant sacrifice?" suggested Mrs. Seymour, with a wistful look, "some trifling concession?"

"A *trifling* concession would not satisfy him, mother; it must be all or nothing."

Mrs. Seymour was silent; she could not urge him further, and yet it seemed so terrible to lose him. *Anything* appeared to her at that moment preferable to such a misfortune.

"You would not, I am sure, wish me to do evil that good may come?" said Herbert, perceiving what was passing in her mind.

"No," she tremblingly answered; "but it seems very hard that you should be deprived thus unjustly of everything which makes life pleasant."

"We must not forget our Saviour's question," returned the young man, looking down upon her with grave, kindly eyes: "'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own

soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?' Oh, my dear mother!" he continued, with an irrepressible burst of emotion, "it matters little what our worldly circumstances are, where we go, or what we do; but it does matter whether we belong to Christ or not, whether we love Him or the world, whether we choose Him for our souls' satisfying portion, and look to Him for salvation and peace and holiness, or allow ourselves to become exclusively captivated by the engrossing affairs of this mortal life. In the one case, though poor and despised on earth, we can look forward to inherit glory at last; in the other, though the world may be gained, *the soul is lost!*"

Mrs. Seymour sighed heavily. She was beginning to discover how little real happiness can be derived from earthly things, though as yet she had experienced no aching void within her own breast, or felt conscious of any of those deep, earnest longings after purity and holiness, which pervade the hearts of those who have commenced their heavenward journey.

For a few minutes longer they continued to converse on the same subject, and then they were obliged to separate.

Early the following morning, the gentleman to whom Mr. Seymour's telegram had been addressed arrived in all haste at the park; and after he and his client had been for a considerable time closeted together, Herbert was requested to join them in the library. He obeyed.

Mr. Malcolm—for this was the lawyer's name—rose from his seat as Herbert entered, and bowed with an air of embarrassment and constraint, such as would have appeared highly ludicrous under different circumstances. Having done this, he resumed his chair, and began awkwardly to turn over the papers which were on the table just in front of him, eyeing the young man meanwhile with a face of grave concern curiously mingled with a certain expression of wonder and incipient contempt. Probably in society Mr. Malcolm might be considered a pleasant and agreeable man; for he was gentlemanly and intelligent, with an easy, assured, and generally refined manner, and a countenance of which he had no reason to be ashamed. Still, Herbert's first impression of him was not a favourable one. An indefinable something in the expression of his keen grey eye seemed to him indicative of a hard, unfeeling, selfish, and unamiable disposition. This impression was rather deepened when, after pointing to a chair, Mr. Seymour said, addressing his son with stern civility,—

"Mr. Malcolm has suggested that your reluctance to comply with my most reasonable demands may proceed either from an imperfect knowledge of, or secret dissatisfaction with, the terms I proposed. I have therefore authorised him to add several very important clauses in your favour, and now give you a last opportunity of accepting my offer. Provided you will submit to my authority *on one solitary point*, I promise you unfettered liberty in every other respect; and further, not only will I make you my sole heir, but—instead of obliging you to wait until my death enables you to come into possession—I have resolved on investing you with a considerable portion of your property *at once*. Moreover; but"—checking himself—"it will be more satisfactory for you to hear the contents of the documents themselves. Mr. Malcolm"—turning with a stately bend to that gentleman—"be good enough to read what you have written."

He obeyed; and when, after having gone through the leading features of the case, and dwelt at some length upon the advantages

which would accrue to Herbert, should such an arrangement be consummated, he came to the final summing up, it almost seemed a repetition of the words—"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

But Herbert did not hesitate for a moment: the glittering prospect thus temptingly held out before him could not shake his resolution—he had already counted the cost. Wealth, friends, ease, and pleasure—yea, life itself, he was ready to sacrifice; but CHRIST—*never!* Gently, but decisively, he made known his sentiments, though it required no little resolution and courage to enable him to do so..

Mr. Seymour listened with a face of ashy paleness; and Herbert saw by the angry light which flashed from his eye, and the stern contraction of his brows, that his wrath was terrible.

"Very well," he said, speaking at length, in a tone where pride struggled with rage, "I will not stoop to urge you further."

He then advanced to the table, slowly and deliberately possessed himself of the papers which had been just read and commented on, and, without another word, committed them to the flames!

Mr. Malcolm made a slight movement, as if he would have rescued them; but a look from Mr. Seymour restrained him. Not until they were completely destroyed did the latter stir from his position in front of the fire; but directly this was accomplished, he turned hastily round, and drawing himself up, with an air of haughty indifference, pointed to another document, which Herbert had not previously noticed, saying significantly,—

"*Now*, it only remains for you to be made acquainted with the contents of *this* paper, so that you may clearly perceive the hopelessness and futility of expecting to receive any further marks of consideration or affection from me. It merely requires to be signed," he continued, after the young man had, in obedience to his desire, perused it; "and that"—crossing the room, and ringing the bell—"can be instantly done."

As soon as the necessary forms had been gone through, Mr. Seymour signified by a wave of the hand, his wish to be relieved of Herbert's presence; and the latter taking the hint, immediately withdrew, knowing himself to be disowned and disinherited! A son from henceforth only in name—scarcely that; unjustly deprived of a son's right, debarred from a son's privileges—denied a son's place; and shut out from a son's affection. While realising this fact in all its bitterness, he was not wholly cast down. One ray of light shone clear and bright amidst the darkness which surrounded him; one throb of rapturous joy mingled with his sorrows, quickening his pulse, and lighting up his eye with a serene and holy triumph; one blissful thought was sufficient to chase away all his sombre reflections, and turn his mourning into thanksgiving and praise:—

"Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

"On the wide world's ocean rudely driven,
Let me gaze upon Thine own bright heaven,
The sweet haven where I long to be;
Give me now the comfort of possessing
What I value as the highest blessing,
Perfect peace through steadfast faith in Thee."

CHAPTER XXII.

HERBERT PREPARES TO LEAVE HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.

"Wherefore our efforts, hopes, desires, or fears?
What can I now attain, and what now lose?" RANEBERG.

FILLED with anger and mortification at the signal failure of his plans, Mr. Seymour sought his wife, and announced to her his intention of proceeding forthwith to London.

This would, he thought, be the easiest mode of getting over the parting scene between herself and Herbert, and also convey to the latter an intimation that every tie which had hitherto bound him to his home and parents was unloosed for ever.

"And Herbert?" asked Mrs. Seymour, with anxious timidity, on receiving his communication.

"My dear Eleanor," returned her husband, in a low, concentrated voice, "I must beg that for the future you will refrain from mentioning that young man's name in my presence."

"O Henry," said the lady, clasping her hands together, and speaking in an earnest, pleading voice, "do not carry your resentment so far as that; you little know what cause you may have to reproach yourself hereafter."

She stopped, terrified at the unnatural rigidity of Mr. Seymour's features; but, rendered bold by despair, continued presently, with a sudden outburst of passionate feeling,—"I almost feel as if it will kill me to be thus cruelly deprived of my only child!"

"Nonsense, my dear;" replied Mr. Seymour, in that tone of half-contemptuous pity which he was in the habit of employing when addressing those whom he looked upon as his inferiors in intellect; "you should dismiss all morbid fancies from your mind; there is happily no chance of such a calamitous event occurring, for I assure you these apparently overwhelming misfortunes do not occasion death."

"*Apparently!*" she gasped; "why it is the bitterest and most grievous trial which could possibly befall me."

"No doubt it seems so to you at present," said Mr. Seymour soothingly, "but you will soon get accustomed to it——"

"Never!" burst impulsively from Mrs. Seymour's lips.

"And even if you should suffer a little," he added with stern significance—purposely turning a deaf ear to his wife's spirited interjection—"your own good sense will, I am sure, show you the advisability of restraining all unseemly exhibition of distress; and also the absolute necessity of upholding my authority and respecting my wishes."

Poor Mrs. Seymour! she was like a bird in the snare of the fowler. Wildly she gazed around her in search of help—none came; earnestly she besought, and implored, and entreated—but all in vain; for, though she fluttered and struggled for a considerable time, she was not the less conquered at last; the indomitable will of her dictatorial

husband, as usual, triumphed over her weak and irresolute spirit; and, feeling that there was no appeal from his decision, she unconsciously yielded herself to his guidance—her heart meanwhile silently gathering itself into her own unshared grief.

Perhaps it was better so. At all events, she thus escaped many stormy scenes which she would otherwise have been compelled to go through—avoided much strife and contention, and saved herself the pain and annoyance of dwelling in a perpetual state of domestic discord—besides having an opportunity afforded her of learning some of those inestimably precious lessons which are never more effectually and beneficially received than during those seasons of peculiar heart-solitude, when, amid the lowliness of sorrow, shut out from human sympathy and human aid, we are led—it may be for the first time—to evoke the presence and sympathy of Jesus, the Man of sorrows.

During the next few days Mr. Seymour scarcely left his wife's side. He wished to prevent her from holding any private communication with Herbert, and he was also very anxious to give her no excuse for indulging useless lamentations and regrets.

Herbert meanwhile spent some time in seriously reflecting upon his future movements. He plainly saw that he must relinquish all thoughts of remaining in the vicinity of Mertonsville; for, in the event of his attempting to carry on his self-denying labours among the villagers, Mr. Seymour would unhesitatingly forbid them to attend his meetings, or receive him in their houses, under penalty of being dismissed from his employ. So far, therefore, he had no choice —go he must. But where? After much and anxious deliberation, he came to the conclusion that he would, in the first instance, proceed to Lanchester, where he could inspect the improvements which James Gordon was superintending in Herbert Cottage, and also have time to resolve on his future course.

He was only allowed a short time in which to make his preparations; for Mr. Seymour—declining to hold any further verbal intercourse with him—signified, in writing, his wish to have the house vacated as speedily as possible, in order that it might be ready for the workmen, who were about to make a few trifling alterations in some of the principal apartments.

And so his last day quickly arrived; and that day happening to be the Sabbath, Herbert once more appeared in the midst of his soon-to-be-forsaken flock, and preached with unusual and most affecting solemnity.

He did intend to allude to his approaching departure from Mertonsville, hoping that it was as yet unknown to any one of them; but had he been less engrossed in the contemplation of the solemn truths he was so earnestly advocating, he could scarcely have failed to perceive, from the palpable signs of deep emotion which were manifested by the greater proportion of his hearers, that they were already well acquainted with the painful fact.

At the conclusion of the service, Herbert—feeling himself quite unequal to the task of holding any personal conversation with them—sat down, and shielding his face with his hands, patiently waited until they should disperse.

After the lapse of a few minutes, he mechanically withdrew his hand, and, hastily glancing around him, found, to his no little surprise, that none of the congregation had left the building. Many, especially

among the women, were standing with their handkerchiefs held to their eyes, while at some little distance a group of men were talking softly but earnestly together.

Among this group was Lisburn, evidently doing his utmost to prevail on them to return quietly to their respective homes; but that he did not succeed in convincing them of the propriety of so doing was obvious by their dissatisfied looks and gestures while he was addressing them, and the expressive shake of the head, which was the only answer they vouchsafed to his kindly-meant proposition.

On beholding the state of things, Herbert—vainly endeavouring to suppress a sigh—rose from his seat; and instantly a patriarchal-looking man, with snowy hair, and tottering footsteps, came forward, and said, constituting himself spokesman,—

"Will you not permit us to speak a few words to you before you go, sir?"

Herbert gave a little start.

"What would you say?" he inquired, with palpable agitation of manner.

"We want to tell you," replied the other; and his voice was low and tremulous, "how much we all love and respect you, how deeply grateful we feel to you for all you have done for us, how our hearts are bleeding at the prospect of losing you, and to assure you, that, go where you will, our poor prayers will follow you."

"Thank you, my friends," said the young man, greatly affected "believe me, I am fully sensible of your kind and loving wishes."

"We also wish to ask you if you will give us a few hints regarding our future conduct, sir," said another man; "every word will be treasured up in our hearts, and whatever you may advise us to do, we are prepared to follow your counsel."

Herbert knew from the tone of marked emphasis with which these words were spoken, that they had a deeper meaning than would at first appear; and for a moment he glanced anxiously and uneasily into the faces of those who surrounded him, as if a new cause of solicitude had just entered his mind. Then making an effort to recover his wonted calmness, he exclaimed in a voice which, though low, was distinctly audible to all—so breathlessly did they listen to catch every syllable,—

"I have no new counsel to offer you, dear friends; therefore my words shall be few. To those who have received Christ, my parting injunction is, walk in Him—live to Him—glorify Him. To the anxious—Behold the Lamb of God. To any who are halting between two opinions—Choose you *this day* whom ye will serve; while I earnestly and affectionately entreat all those who may be still the enemies of the Cross of Christ to consider their ways, amend their doings, and turn unto the Lord. For myself"—here his voice very perceptibly faltered—"I need scarcely say, that I shall look back with peculiar satisfaction upon the many happy hours we have spent together; and should we never meet again in this world, oh! let me meet you all in heaven."

For an instant he paused, almost unmanned by the sight of his weeping congregation; but presently added in a firmer voice,—

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of his grace; fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life. Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all things

—the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come *all are yours*, and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's."

After casting another glance of mingled sorrow and tenderness around him, Herbert opened his hymn-book, and said,—

"Before we finally separate, let us once more mingle our voices together in singing this appropriate song of praise:

'Blest be the dear uniting love
That will not let us part;
Our bodies may far off remove—
We still are one in heart.
Joined in one spirit to our Head,
Where He appoints we go;
And still in Jesus' footsteps tread,
And do His work below.'"

As soon as the last cadence of their voices died away, the young man hastened to leave the building. He accomplished his purpose, though not without difficulty, and an hour later might have been seen traversing the floor of his own study at Mertonsville, after having gone through a somewhat similar scene with those who, when the more public Sabbath services were ended, received a share of his attention and labour.

And while he thus paced his apartment, with a pale, grave face, and a heart filled with the keenest anguish—while he cast from time to time an eager, wistful look around him, upon the many beautiful objects which he had been wont to regard as his own—while he notes this and that costly article which had been purchased for his exclusive benefit by his indulgent parents; this and that alteration which had been effected in the room, to meet the caprices of a boyish fancy, or satisfy a boyish whim—while he listens to the ticking of an elegant little ormolu clock which stands upon the mantelpiece, and remembers how his father presented it to him long years ago, when he was quite a child preparing his lessons in that very room, and then goes on to reflect upon the pleasant and profitable hours he had so often enjoyed there since then—while he abstractedly takes down a book from one of the well-filled shelves and reads inscribed in gilt letters upon its purple morroco cover,—

"This Library, consisting of
1,000 volumes,
Was presented to Herbert Seymour,
On his sixteenth birthday,
By his affectionate
Father,"

he begins to ask himself whether the fact of his being obliged to bid a long uncertain farewell to all these associations, and become an exile from his much-loved home, was not a mere creation of his own disordered fancy, rather than a plain, sober truth.

While still absorbed in these melancholy musings, a hand was suddenly laid upon his shoulder, and on turning round with a start of surprise, not having heard the door open or shut, he beheld his friend Charles Hastings.

"Charles!" he exclaimed in a voice of the greatest astonishment, "how is this? I thought you were in London."

"So I was until this morning," answered the young man, throwing himself down on a chair, and regarding Herbert with a glance of keen anxiety.

"You are all well?" said the latter, dubiously.

"Of course we are," was the somewhat impatient rejoinder; "but I could not rest without coming to find out the truth of what I have heard regarding yourself. And now that I am here," he added moodily, "I almost regret having undertaken the journey, for I have gained nothing but the most unsatisfactory intelligence."

"Perhaps matters are not quite so hopeless as you imagine," said Herbert, endeavouring to speak cheerfully.

Charles Hastings shook his head as he replied, "You need not try to represent things in a better position than they really are, Herbert; I know precisely how you are situated—I have, in fact, just had an interview with Mr. Seymour."

"With my father!" ejaculated Herbert; "how was that?"

"I happened to meet him as I was crossing the hall, and he invited me into his library, apparently for the purpose of consulting me about the alterations he is going to have made in it, but *really*, I believe, with the view of preventing me from seeing you until after I had listened to this account of your unparalleled obstinacy and infatuation."

"You did not favour him with one of your indignant protests, I trust," said Herbert, rather anxiously; for he knew that his warm-hearted friend was always ready to take up the cudgels on his behalf, whenever an opportunity for doing so was afforded him; and, moreover, he was painfully conscious that in Mr. Seymour's present state of mind, he would deeply resent the least appearance of hostility, and fiercely put down any attempt at remonstrance or reproach.

"No," returned Mr. Hastings, in a very different tone from the careless, off-hand one he generally assumed; "to be candid with you, Herbert, I felt so astounded at your father's cool, dignified, pitiless manner; so disgusted with the frigid calmness of his voice when speaking of the cruel measures he had adopted towards you, that I was for the moment literally struck dumb; not one word therefore did I utter, good or bad!"

"You acted wisely," returned Herbert, greatly relieved; "if anything unpleasant had occurred between you, it would have grieved me not a little; for your future intercourse with him might have been materially affected by it, and——"

"That would not trouble me," replied the other, hotly; "for I have no intention whatever of coming here for the future. Do you for one instant suppose," he asked, his eye flashing angrily, "that I will continue to visit one who prides himself on having so mercilessly driven my own chosen friend from his house? No, no: I have witnessed Mr. Seymour in a new character to-night; I have not the slightest wish to perfect my acquaintance in that quarter!" and he laughed a short dry laugh, as if to intimate the absurdity of attempting to shake his resolution.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SIR GEORGE HASTINGS' INVITATION.

"Be steady, be steady, O my soul;
For the sea is come, and the billows roll."

"LISTEN to me, dear Charles," said Herbert, speaking gently and soothingly to his excited friend. "You say you are fully aware of my present position?" Mr. Hastings nodded assent. "Then, of course, you know that I leave Mertonsville to-morrow?"

Again the same mute gesture of confirmation.

"But perhaps it has not occurred to you that, notwithstanding the painfulness of my situation, there is another whose sufferings will be, if possible, even more acute—I allude to my mother."

"Ah! yes, I understand you," responded Mr. Hastings, thoughtfully; "*she* will not, I am sure, approve of Mr. Seymour's unjustifiable behaviour."

"Nevertheless, she must submit to his arrangements," said Herbert, significantly.

"I am not so sure of that," cried the impetuous young man: "a little rebellion on her part would be quite commendable under such peculiar circumstances."

"Ah! Charles," exclaimed Herbert, gravely, "you are still very imperfectly acquainted with my father's character, or you would see that, following the course you recommend, would be the most effectual mode of confirming him in his determination, besides exposing my dear mother to considerable danger and annoyance. Hitherto, she has confined herself to unavailing remonstrances and entreaties, and I fervently hope she will refrain from any stronger expressions of dissatisfaction."

"To what is all this tending?" inquired Mr. Hastings, suddenly beginning to find out that Herbert had some reason for speaking thus.

"Can you not guess, Charles?" answered his friend, with a melancholy smile. "I am going to ask you for a last token of your friendship. You know how sad it is for a mother to be suddenly deprived of her only son; now, I want you to promise me that when I am gone, you will continue to come here as usual, and try to cheer and console her when you find her in need of comfort."

"Anything but that, Herbert."

"You know," continued the latter, persuasively, "my mother is accustomed to you, and loves you only second to myself; if, therefore, you will do as I suggest, my absence cannot be felt by her to the same extent as must otherwise be the case, and numerous opportunities will be afforded you of supplying my place."

"But Mr. Seymour? I shall hate to be brought in contact with him; besides, I am afraid I could not restrain myself from plainly telling him my opinion of his conduct."

"For the sake of the past, you *will* repress every disrespectful word, dear Charles. When you feel disposed to speak out, remember

how repeatedly I have thwarted, provoked, and opposed him, and if that does not suffice, recollect that he is my father.

"And *what* a father!" observed Mr. Hastings, expressively. "Why not follow the cue he has given you, and disown the relationship altogether?"

"Then if nothing else will influence you," said Herbert, determined to carry his point if possible, for the sake of his mother, who was really attached to the frank, good-humoured young man, "I must fall back on my last and strongest argument, and appeal to your generosity."

Charles Hastings shook his head dubiously, and shrugged his shoulders with an air of dissatisfaction at the part thus assigned to him; but ultimately his good nature, together with the feelings of warm and sincere friendship he entertained for Herbert, prevailed over his natural repugnance to undertake so delicate a task, and he yielded himself, if not quite cheerfully, at least resignedly, to the latter's earnest desire; and promised, moreover, that should Mr. Seymour's tyrannical propensities prompt him to prevent his wife from receiving and answering her son's letters, he would engage to allay her fears, by giving her every necessary information regarding Herbert's health, prospects, and whereabouts.

When this matter was finally arranged, Charles Hastings turned abruptly to his friend, and said, with a degree of hesitancy and embarrassment most unusual to him,—

"I am the bearer of a letter from my father. Will you read it now, and tell me whether you can agree to our wishes?"

He laid it on the table, and walked to the other end of the room, in order that Herbert might be undisturbed with finding out its contents. The first past of the letter ran thus:—

"My dear Herbert,—I have just received a vague report of the misunderstanding which has arisen between yourself and Mr. Seymour, and lose not a moment in writing to assure you of my sympathy with you, in the painful position you now occupy, as well as to tell you how happy it will make us if we can persuade you to accept a home with us for the future. I need not, I trust, ask you to look upon this as no mere formal invitation; your life-long knowledge of us must convince you of the heartfelt sincerity with which the request is made, and the affectionate and cordial welcome you will receive, should you consent to follow my advice. To remove any hesitation you might otherwise feel, I may as well mention a plan which has just presented itself to my mind, and which, if carried out, will probably suit your present feelings better than remaining in the neighbourhood of so many painful associations." And then the writer went on to suggest that Herbert should spend a year or two, or longer if necessary, in travelling with Charles, so that Mr. Seymour's wrath might have time to evaporate before he saw or heard of his son again.

The rest of the letter was filled up with expressions of kindness and regard, such as caused a dimness to pass before the young man's eyes, and stirred his heart within him.

"Charles," he said, advancing to his friend, who was still in a distant part of the room, apparently absorbed in a book which he held in his hand, "I shall take the earliest opportunity of writing to thank Sir George for this wholly unexpected proof of his kind and generous

affection. You perceive," he added, with a little sigh, "that I am at present too weary, both in body and mind, to give utterance to the deep gratitude I nevertheless feel."

"Gratitude!" ejaculated his friend, hastily, almost angrily—muttering to himself; "what a *mal-apropos* remark!"

"Yes, let it be gratitude, Charles," said Herbert, gently. "No other word could so suitably express my sentiments. Your father has given me cause to be grateful, and grateful I am!"

"But will you do as he proposes?" inquired the young man, impulsively.

"I think not, Charles," was the quiet answer.

"Ah! I feared you would say so," returned Mr. Hastings, while a keen look of disappointment swept over his face.

"I *must*, in the first place, go to Lanchester," replied Herbert, in a tone of friendly decision.

"And afterwards?" said his friend, persuasively.

Herbert shook his head.

"Afterwards I must be guided by circumstances. It is *just possible* that I may remain there altogether; but on this point I cannot speak with any degree of certainty. However, I will let you know directly my plans are formed; and in the meantime do not consider me cold or devoid of feeling, because, while fully sensible of your kindness, I am unable to avail myself of it."

"I shall miss you sadly," said Charles Hastings, despondingly. "You will not forget me?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"Never!" rejoined Herbert, warmly. "And you!" he added presently, "dare I ask you to visit me in my humble abode, wherever that may be?"

"If you do not ask me, I will come uninvited," responded the other, with something of his old vivacity. "We have been friends from our childhood, and friends we must remain, in spite of the barrier arising from the dissimilarity of our views and purposes, which you once imagined would prove a stumbling-block in the way of our future intercourse."

"And is it needful that this barrier should continue?" asked Herbert, in a grave, earnest tone; "shall we always follow different paths, instead of walking side by side on the road to glory?"

"Not always, I hope," answered the other, startled for a moment; "surely not always! There is, I confess, a wide gulf between us at present, but after a time, I trust——"

"Ah! it is the old story," exclaimed Herbert, sadly, when his friend paused, scarcely knowing how to finish his sentence. "You are waiting for the convenient season, which, alas! in numberless instances, never arrives. God grant," he added fervently, as he clasped his friend's hand in his own, for the latter had risen to go, "that you, my dear Charles, may be led to seek the Lord while He may be found, and call upon Him while He is near."

"I *will* begin to think on these things," cried Mr. Hastings, deeply moved. "I have neglected them too long already!" and he was certainly sincere at the moment he made this resolution; for the grave solemnity of Herbert's manner had produced a very decided impression on his mind.

Whether, however, this impression would prove abiding, or pass away like a morning cloud, or the early dew, when exposed to the

temptations of a deceitful world, strengthened by the inclination of a treacherous heart, remains to be seen. Herbert feared even while he hoped, and though he rejoiced at his companion's wise determination, it was with trembling.

Not one moment's repose visited the latter that night, during the whole of which he was beset by innumerable and inexpressibly bitter reflections, doubts, misgivings, and perplexities. He had imagined that the worst was already over, the fiercest foes already subjugated. Alas! he now discovered that a far severer conflict awaited him. He was, figuratively speaking, surrounded by the shadowy forms and baneful influences of a host of relentless enemies, who attacked him on every side, with crafty and malignant force—if haply they might, at the eleventh hour, be successful in shaking his faith, and leading him to loosen his hold of eternal things while contemplating those which are seen and temporal. Like King Jehoshaphat, Herbert might have cried out, in this period of his troublous career,—"I have no might against this great company that cometh against me, neither know I what to do; but my eyes are upon Thee."

Morning found him calm; not with the calmness of stolid indifference, or weak, unresisting submission to some stronger will, or the sluggishness of dull, irreversible despair, but of victory—such victory as those and those only attain who have struggled, and wrestled, and fought—and overcome!

"Have striven,
Achieving calm, to whom was given
The joy that mixes man with heaven."

This calm and this joy was Herbert's!

I omit all mention of his last interview with Mrs. Seymour; for great grief, like great joy, shrinks from a stranger's gentlest touch; and the bleeding heart, knowing its own bitterness, cannot endure the thought of having its secret agony exposed to the view of others.

Afterwards, Herbert visited the servants' hall, where a very touching scene awaited him; for he was beloved and respected by every member of his father's household; and great had been the consternation which prevailed when the news of his approaching departure was carried to them.

How they became acquainted with it, Herbert never discovered, but it was scarcely possible that they should be wholly blind to what was going on around them. They had, in fact, been for some time aware of the relative position in which father and son stood to each other; and, having once had their suspicions aroused and anxieties awakened, they found no difficulty in comprehending the meaning of certain stray sentences which unconsciously fell from the lips of Mr. Seymour when he considered himself alone, or accounting for the unusual pensiveness of his wife's manner; and finally, every doubt was removed by the sudden arrival of Mr. Malcolm at the Park, and the summons which Browning and the old steward received, to witness the signature of the important document that Mr. Seymour had insisted on having attested, when he at length despaired of forcing Herbert to yield to his arbitrary commands.

This document, Browning instantly conjectured, must contain something detrimental to our hero's interest, and being of a warm and impulsive nature, he lost no time in communicating his well-grounded

suspicions to his fellow-servants. Their indignation was deep, though not loudly expressed, and several of them—Browning included—begged so earnestly to be allowed to accompany him, that Herbert could not for a long time convince them of the impracticability of acceding to their reiterated request, or induce them to decide on retaining their present situations.

As he quitted them on this melancholy occasion, after speaking a kind word to each, and receiving from them the welcome intelligence that they had resolved on assembling in the housekeeper's room both night and morning for the purpose of studying God's Word together, he found that the carriage which was to convey him to Dilton stood waiting at the door.

Before he entered it, however, he stood for a moment, as if debating some point with himself; then turning resolutely away, he murmured softly, "I must see him, if only for a moment; surely he will not refuse to bid me farewell."

Thus saying, he recrossed the hall, and after knocking at the door of his father's library, opened it, and without more ado walked into the room, feeling, it must be confessed, not unlike one about to beard a lion in his den.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HERBERT OBLIGED TO SEEK ANOTHER HOME.

"And opportunity I here have had
To try thee, sift thee, and confess have found thee
Proof against all temptation." MILTON.

MR. SEYMOUR was sitting upon a large easy-chair near the fire, his chin resting on his hand, and his whole attitude betokening thought.

He turned his head with a gesture of impatience as the door opened, evidently expecting to see a servant. When he discovered who the intruder was, his eye flashed angrily, and a hard, stern look took immediate possession of his face.

"To what am I indebted for this wholly unexpected and, I may add, wholly unnecessary and most unwelcome visit?" he inquired, in a slow, dry, measured tone, rising from his seat as he spoke, and remaining standing, as if to intimate that the interview must be a short one.

For several seconds Herbert could not answer; a mist rose before his eyes, and his head grew dizzy, so that he would have fallen, had he not firmly grasped the back of a chair for support. After what he had already gone through that morning, it was not surprising that this last stroke should well-nigh overpower him.

However, he did not quite succumb; but, summoning into action his latent capacities of endurance, rallied his strength with astonishing rapidity, and as soon as the power of utterance returned to him, said, fixing his eyes steadily and sorrowfully upon his father's countenance, "I am aware that my presence is very irksome to you; still, I scarcely imagined you would object to tolerate it for a few moments at this particular time."

Mr. Seymour bowed coldly and haughtily; and Herbert, chilled by the repelling stiffness of his manner, continued mournfully,—

"I see that you have ceased to feel the least regard for me; but as, in obedience to your command, I am about to leave this neighbourhood, and as I may never again have an opportunity of addressing you, I trust you will not refuse to speak to me before I go."

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Seymour, calmly. "As you justly observe, this will be probably our last interview; we may as well therefore get over it as quickly as possible."

"And have you nothing more to say?" asked Herbert, in a choking voice.

"*Nothing*," answered his inexorable father.

"Not one word of kindness! not even a glance of affection!" murmured the young man, in the intensity of his grief. "O father, this is cruel."

"Stay," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, hastily seizing a sheet of paper, and, after writing a few lines on it, handing it to his son, together with an unsealed letter which he took from his desk. "Here is the address of Mr. Malcolm, who, as you are aware, manages all my

business transactions for me. If ever you wish to communicate with me, it must be through him; *otherwise*, your letters will be consigned to the flames unread."

"May I not write to my mother?" inquired Herbert, with keen anxiety.

"Certainly," was Mr. Seymour's ready response. "You are at liberty to *write* to her as often as you please."

His look seemed to say that, notwithstanding this permission, it was doubtful whether she would ever be suffered to receive his letters, if he wrote them.

"This," continued Mr. Seymour, pointing to the other paper which Herbert held in his hand, "is a letter to my bankers, by which you will perceive that I have instructed them to pay you a fixed yearly sum, sufficient to maintain you in tolerable comfort, but nothing more. I need scarcely say that my reason for making this slight concession is to prevent any one from being able to charge me with having allowed a Seymour to starve; or, what is nearly as bad, forced him to work for his daily bread. At the same time I wish you clearly to understand that I decline under any circumstances to increase the specified allowance. If, therefore, you choose to incur debt, or disgrace yourself in other ways, you will of course suffer for your folly. From this hour we shall be total strangers to each other; and should we at some future time have the misfortune to meet again—which God forbid!—it must be as such."

Herbert felt while listening to this candid explanation, as if the last drop of bitterness had been added to his cup. His cheek flushed deep with shame and sorrow, and laying down the papers upon the table, he exclaimed in a tone of grave surprise,—

"I am sorry that you should have supposed me capable of accepting the bounty which you offer me under these very distressing circumstances."

"I do not comprehend you, sir," observed Mr. Seymour, coldly.

"You have taken from me what I prized far more than the richest inheritance," proceeded the young man, with quiet dignity; "and no amount of wealth could compensate for the loss of your affection."

Mr. Seymour bit his lip. "Do you mean positively to decline receiving any pecuniary aid from me?" he asked in pure astonishment.

"I cannot accept *money* where *love* is withheld," answered his son, firmly.

"Perhaps when you have once tasted the sweets of poverty," returned the gentleman, ironically, "you will not continue these heroics."

"Poverty in itself is fortunately no disgrace," said Herbert, thoughtfully, "and——"

"May I presume to ask you how you intend to live?" inquired Mr. Seymour, with a sneer.

"I am not altogether penniless——"

"True, you have the paltry interest of a few thousands to fall back upon; but what is that? a mere pittance!"

"If it is not sufficient, I can work."

"You work!" said Mr. Seymour expressively, eying him with a sharp glance of scrutiny; "but a truce to this trifling," he added sternly; "do you insist on refusing my help?"

Herbert bowed.

"Then it only remains for me to wish you good-morning, I suppose," returned Mr. Seymour, in a voice destitute of a spark of feeling; and he moved majestically towards the door.

Herbert would have withdrawn without another word, so convinced was he of the futility of expecting the rock to soften; but his eye chanced to light upon a large painting which occupied a prominent position at the opposite extremity of the room, and the sight of it at that instant touched him acutely. It was a family group, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Seymour and himself, a merry, laughing child of six summers; and, as he turned from the placid countenance of his happy mother, and gazed at the gentleman who stood leaning on the back of her chair—looking, not stern and proud, but contented and pleased, an indulgent smile upon his lip, and a soft light shining in his eye, while he watched with a father's partial fondness the movements of his only son—the young man's heart was filled to overflowing, and, forgetting all restraint, he exclaimed, in suffocating accents,—

"Must I leave you thus? O my father, do not part from me in anger—only speak one word to tell me that you forgive me——"

He could say no more; but, impelled by a sudden and irresistible impulse, he seized his father's hand, and, before that gentleman had recovered from his astonishment, carried it to his lips.

Mr. Seymour was evidently moved at last. A wild tumult of feeling awoke in his breast, and the haughty expression of his countenance softened, until it almost seemed as if he would relent. But with the speed of lightning his emotion disappeared, and, apparently enraged with himself for having manifested this momentary weakness, he muttered a fierce imprecation, and roughly snatched his hand from Herbert's grasp.

Then, regaining, as if by magic, his former cold and pitiless manner, he opened the door with ostentatious politeness, and, after saying, stiffly and ceremoniously,—"Permit me the honour of bidding you farewell,"—he dismissed him with a stately bend of the head.

As may be imagined, Herbert had no wish to remain longer. He gravely returned his father's bow, and retired—a flood of strange emotion rushing into his wounded and desolate heart.

"Redclif fears you will be late for the train, sir," said Browning, accosting him just as he was stepping into the carriage. Then perceiving that Herbert neither saw nor heard him, he continued—perhaps with a lingering hope that something might yet occur to prevent the young man from taking his contemplated journey—"Would it not be better to wait for the next train?"

"No, no," said Herbert, coming out of his reverie after the question had been repeated more than once, "I cannot remain here another moment. We may yet be in time," he added, glancing interrogatively at the coachman.

"I will do my best, sir," answered the latter, respectfully; and Herbert, drawing his hat over his brow, leaned back in the carriage, and did not again lift his eyes until they were at some distance from the house.

Thanks to Redclif's rapid driving, they reached the railway station at Dilton before the arrival of the train. Having taken his ticket, Herbert returned to give the footman, who had accompanied him, a few directions regarding some of his luggage, which had not yet been forwarded, and dismissed the carriage; when to his surprise and

regret, he found that several of his humble friends were waiting to see him off. So far, however, from making any attempt to intrude themselves on his notice, they moved away directly he approached, as if to show that they understood and respected his feelings, and were resolved not to augment his grief by making any open demonstration of their own.

Herbert appreciated this silent and unobtrusive sympathy, in proof of which he turned towards them just as he was about to take his place in the train, and, after bestowing on them one last kindly glance of recognition, lifted his hat—and was gone!

Meanwhile, Mrs. Seymour lies on the couch in the solitude of her own room, pale and miserable. She has wept abundantly, and her tears have, in some measure, relieved her overcharged heart; but from the peevish and careworn expression which her face wears, it can at once be seen that she still continues to brood over her grief; while the angry contortions which occasionally destroy the pleasing regularity of her features, the frown which so repeatedly darkens her usually placid brow, and the sudden contemptuous flash which is emitted from her clear blue eye, proclaims only too loudly that she is listening to the artful insinuations of one, who, being himself the hater of peace and lover of discord, and desiring nothing better than to create strife and dissension between the members of one household, would gladly persuade her that to "suffer and be still" is a maxim which should be adopted by none but fools. And as even a worm will turn when trod upon, so Mrs. Seymour, notwithstanding the natural indolence of her disposition, and the repugnance with which she shrank from entering into any argument or discussion with her husband, felt so enraged at his injustice and unkindness to herself, as well as Herbert, that she resolved on going in immediate search of him, and reproaching him as the author of her sufferings.

CHAPTER XXV.

WILLSON SOOTHING HER IRRITATED MISTRESS.

"Some dream that they can silence when they will
The storm of passion, and say, *Peace, be still!*"

JUST as Mrs. Seymour was preparing with a palpitating heart to carry her purpose into execution, the door of her room was quietly opened, and a pleasant-looking woman, with grey hair, and a gentle, refined manner, entered, and advanced close up to the couch, bearing a small silver salver in her hand.

"I have brought you a glass of wine, ma'am," she said, in a tone of much feeling, "for I am sure you must need it by this time."

Mrs. Seymour turned round with a surprised start, but on seeing who it was she seemed greatly relieved.

"Why did you take this trouble, my good Willson?" she asked: for Willson had been an old and valued servant of Mrs. Seymour's mother, and now resided at the Park, where she was expected to finish her days in rest and comfort.

The grey-haired woman made no reply to this question; she was gazing anxiously and tenderly into the lady's face, and when she saw how pale and sorrowful that face was, her own eyes filled with tears.

"Ah! Willson, you can feel for me," exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, laying her head once more on the cushion, and weeping bitterly.

"Do not grieve thus, my dear lady," said Willson, soothingly; "we have all cause to lament Mr. Herbert's departure, but we must console ourselves with the thought that God does everything——"

"But it is not His doing," replied Mrs. Seymour, passionately; "that is what makes it so hard to bear."

Willson shook her head gravely. "You know, ma'am, He often brings good out of evil."

"I wish I could think of any good which can possibly spring from this," sighed Mrs. Seymour.

"Who knows?" said the old woman, trying to speak hopefully. "He may have some wise reason which we cannot now discern, for permitting you to be thus afflicted. I remember hearing Mr. Herbert say, in one of his sermons, that man's wrath is only allowed to work God's will; and when that is accomplished, its violence is immediately restrained."

"Man's wrath!" repeated Mrs. Seymour, in accents of concentrated bitterness. "Yes, that is the secret of it all!"

Willson noted with extreme uneasiness the unusual irritation of manner which her mistress seemed to be unsuccessfully striving against, as well as the perturbed, fretful, and excited expression of her countenance, which gave her a clear insight into the state of her feelings. For suffering, anguish, and even despair, she was prepared; but she had not anticipated finding her thus incensed against Mr. Seymour, and for a moment she stood stunned and silenced by the apprehension, lest while labouring under her present sentiments she

should be led to give utterance to some remark which might have the effect of turning her husband's wrath against herself; and the faithful creature shuddered at the idea of the gentle-spirited lady being exposed to such a terrible calamity, knowing full well that however energetically she might resist at first, she would be more than conquered at last.

Presently, however, the look of intense anxiety passed away from Willson's face, and putting the salver on a small table which she drew close to the sofa, she suddenly left the room, murmuring softly to herself,—

"He told me not to give it to her for a few days; but I am sure if he could only see her now he would wish her to get it at once."

Almost before Mrs. Seymour had discovered her absence, she returned, holding a letter in her hand.

"What have you there, Willson?" inquired the lady, somewhat pettishly; for in the selfishness of her sorrow she fancied that the former had not manifested as much tenderness and sympathy as she was in the habit of doing.

"It is a letter from Mr. Herbert."

"From Herbert!" cried Mrs. Seymour, hastily starting up, and seizing it with great eagerness; "where did you find it?"

"He brought it to me himself, desiring me to keep it for a few days, and then tell you that his feelings would not permit him to *say* what he wished and intended; and therefore he thought it better to write to you instead."

"Poor fellow!" said Mrs. Seymour, in a tone of unutterable tenderness; and she gazed long and lovingly at the superscription written in his well-known handwriting, ere she broke the seal.

"Thank God, she is calmer already," mentally aspirated her thoughtful attendant. "I will leave you now," she said aloud, "so that you may be undisturbed while reading your letter."

"Do so," returned the lady, laying her white jewelled hand upon the other's thin wrinkled one, "but be sure and come to me again by-and-by, for I cannot endure the presence of Juliet" (her maid) "to-day."

After promising to obey her, Willson departed; and when two hours had elapsed, she again repaired to Mrs. Seymour's apartment.

Her first glance assured her that she had wisely judged in supposing that the perusal of her son's letter would produce a softening and altogether beneficial influence upon the bereaved mother's heart.

She—Mrs. Seymour—lay back upon her cushions, pale, grave, and sad; but the fierce, angry, excited look had, to a great extent, disappeared—although it was sufficiently obvious that she could not yet think of her husband without bitterness and indignation.

The position she occupied was indeed a critical one; for her mind was in that vacillating and irresolute state, when a breath might serve to fan the spark of anger which still smouldered in her breast, into a steady flame; the utterance of any injudicious words, the expression of a face, and tones of a voice, the glance of an eye, would be enough to awaken, or rather deepen, impressions which would lead to the most disastrous consequences, and prove a serious impediment to her future happiness.

Willson, being a clear-judging and right-minded woman, soon perceived the danger which threatened her, and with characteristic

gentleness and tact reminded her how necessary it was that she should, for Herbert's sake, patiently submit to the painful dispensation.

"For Herbert's sake!" echoed Mrs. Seymour, who had been hitherto listening to the other's argument with ill-disguised impatience; "how can it benefit *him*, my good Willson?"

"Do you not see, ma'am," answered the latter, in a low tone, "that if—as you at first proposed—you were to rebel against Mr. Seymour's authority, it would most certainly have the effect of making him all the more inveterate against Mr. Herbert?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, anxiously, "do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it; for he would of course naturally lament that this root of bitterness should have sprung up between you, after you had enjoyed so many years of uninterrupted concord—and Mr. Herbert would get the blame of it."

"Well, it may be so," said the lady, disconsolately.

Finding that she had succeeded in gaining Mrs. Seymour's attention, Willson proceeded to use every argument she could think of to induce the former to avoid the commencement of a quarrel with Mr. Seymour. She ended by hinting that as the separation might only be a temporary one, it would be wiser to think and speak of it in that light, and as

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast,"

Mrs. Seymour eagerly caught at the welcome suggestion, which instantly relieved her from a terrible incubus, and restored to her something of her old placidity of demeanour.

But though she had accomplished much, Willson was not yet satisfied.

She knew that if left to herself, Mrs. Seymour's gloomy reflections would speedily return; her next step, therefore, was to persuade her to leave the couch, and prepare for dinner.

Here, however, she was met by very decided opposition.

"It is perfectly ridiculous," she exclaimed, angrily, when the bold proposal was made to her; "how can you suppose me equal to the task of dining with my husband after what has this day occurred?"

"I know it will be a very painful exertion," said Willson, persuasively; "still I am sure you would afterwards feel thankful that you had undertaken it. Mr. Seymour will no doubt be touched by such an undeserved mark of kindness and attention, and appreciate it accordingly. I dare say he is at this very moment ill at ease, and perhaps reproaching himself for having caused you so much suffering."

"And well he may," murmured the lady; but she did not again object to accede to Willson's request.

The latter, who at her own desire assisted her to dress (for she still shrank from the attendance of her voluble French maid) had some difficulty in dissuading her from arraying herself in a suit of deep mourning. It was in vain that she reminded her of her former hopeful expressions, and represented the inconsistency of expecting, and utterly despairing of, Herbert's return at the same moment; *black* she would and did wear; but she finally so far yielded to Willson's remonstrances as to allow her to replace the heavy, sombre-looking crape-trimmed garments that she had herself selected, by a black velvet dress, the simple elegance of which became her well, although Willson, in her extreme anxiety to afford Mr. Seymour no shadow

of excuse for being dissatisfied with his wife, would fain have persuaded her that the addition of a rich scarlet scarf would be a great improvement.

"No, no," said Mrs. Seymour, gently, as she removed it from her shoulders; "I shall feel more comfortable without it." And she proceeded to fasten her lace collar with a small diamond brooch—the only ornament she wore; and then, her toilet completed, she turned round, and submitted herself to the inspection of her aged attendant; saying, with a melancholy smile, while endeavouring to assume a playful tone, "Well, Willson, I am going. Is your unreasonable heart satisfied at last?"

"It is indeed," answered the old woman, observing with secret pleasure the softened and subdued, though pensive, expression which her face now bore "I am sure," she added, passing her hand hastily across her eyes, "if your dear angel-mother were to see you now, she would approve of your conduct. She never, I believe, resented an injury, even in thought."

A bright gleam of pleased surprise glanced athwart Mrs. Seymour's cheek at this allusion to her sainted parent.

"You do well to remind me of her," she said gravely; "she was perfect! but—I, alas! I shall never resemble her."

She paused in deep emotion, and Willson was about to make some encouraging reply, when the gong sounded for dinner.

Slowly and falteringly Mrs. Seymour descended to the dining-room. At the foot of the stairs she met her husband, who was evidently in search of her. He looked stern, sullen, and abstracted; severe, splenetic, and defiant; and a tremor agitated the gentle lady's frame as she gazed at him, meanwhile congratulating herself on having followed Willson's counsel, and thus escaped incurring his anger on her own account.

And here I may perhaps be permitted to say one word in favour of the excellent spirit which actuated Willson in the part she had taken on this occasion.

Many, very many there are, who use the influence they possess, whether it be much or little, for evil instead of good. Many, very many, who seem to take positive delight in scattering the noxious seeds of discord wherever they go—widening breaches when they might close them, creating strife, although it may be in their power to prevent it, encouraging misconception and misunderstanding, and lending a helping hand in the wrong direction to such as are hesitating between a sense of duty and the leanings of a proud or revengeful disposition; and while they thus glaringly disregard the significant precept, "Live in peace," it is surprising that they should be strangers to the no less significant promise, "The God of love and peace shall be with you."

Would that the glorious benediction pronounced by the lips of Him who "spake as never man spake," were inscribed in living, ineffaceable characters upon the walls of every dwelling and every heart:

"Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BURNT LETTER.

"Where is peace?
There where our spirits rest
From time and space."

To return to Mr. Seymour. Directly his stern eye lighted on his wife, it softened; and he hastened forward, and conducted her to the dining-room with evident satisfaction, and every outward mark of politeness and consideration.

Perhaps a pang of remorse came over him at the sight of her pale, sorrowful countenance; perhaps his own heart, proud and partial though it was, reminded him how unnatural and selfish his conduct had been; how harshly and ungenerously he had acted towards her, and how little pains he had taken to spare her feelings or promote her happiness. Be this as it may, he certainly did all in his power to efface the remembrance of what she had that day undergone from her mind, and was persevering in his efforts to awaken in her another and more pleasing train of thought.

Nor was he offended, although Mrs. Seymour evinced little, if any, interest in anything he said; nor discouraged by the short, constrained replies she gave when common civility required that she should speak; he seemed determined to exert himself to the very utmost, so as to afford her no reasonable plea for accusing him of coldness or indifference.

They dined quite alone; but before the meal was ended the door opened, and, to the profound astonishment of both, Mr. Hastings stepped into the room!

The sight of him brought a slight shade of embarrassment to Mr. Seymour's face; he instantly rose, however, and welcomed him with extraordinary *empressement*.

Charles Hastings hesitated a moment before accepting his offered hand, and a quick indignant flush came unbidden to his cheek; but it passed away so speedily, that none but a keen-sighted observer would have noticed anything particular in his manner—except that he was much graver and more thoughtful than usual.

He drew up a chair close to Mrs. Seymour, and tried, though without receiving much encouragement, to engage her in conversation.

After he had introduced and dismissed several subjects, and still failed to gain her attention, he turned to her with a little smile, and said, endeavouring to resume his old playful tone,—"You must allow me to accompany you to the drawing-room, Mrs. Seymour" (she had risen to go). "And when I am there, you will not refuse to give me a cup of tea, I hope; for indeed I well deserve one!"

"What makes you think so?" was her listless response, as she led the way, rather reluctantly, to the drawing-room.

She had intended leaving the two gentlemen together, and retiring to her own apartment, where she could once more enjoy the luxury

of being alone with her grief; the young man's proposal did not, therefore, prove very acceptable to her.

Mr. Seymour, on the contrary, followed them with peculiar satisfaction, feeling inwardly rejoiced at having thus fortunately obtained such a valuable assistant.

"Well, you shall judge for yourself," continued Mr. Hastings, taking possession of a corner of Mrs. Seymour's sofa. "I have been scarcely out of the saddle since six o'clock this morning."

"Indeed," said the lady, wearily; "you had an object, I suppose?"

"Yes; my object was to transact a little matter of business for you."

"For me!" echoed Mrs. Seymour, rousing herself.

"Oh, it was really nothing after all," proceeded the young man, carelessly; "but knowing that you had lost your little favourite Roselle, and having often heard you speak in terms of admiration of the curious dog Lord Monkford prizes so much, I thought I would try to get you one bearing some resemblance to it."

Mrs. Seymour shook her head. "It was very kind of you Charles," she said, "but I wish you had not taken this trouble; for every one knows that there is not another like it all over the country."

"So I found," answered Charles Hastings, gravely; "I was therefore necessitated to apply to Lord Monkford himself at last; and for this purpose I rode over to Tulford, and had an audience with him. After beating about the bush for some time, I plunged *in medias res*, and requested him to make over the beautiful creature to me!"

In spite of her sorrow, Mrs. Seymour was greatly amused at his *nonchalance*.

"How could you venture to make such an audacious proposal?" she asked presently.

Charles Hastings shrugged his shoulders with a very unconcerned air, as he laughingly replied,

"I told him that I considered it a very unsuitable dog for a gentleman, and strongly recommended his parting with it."

"Was he angry at your interference?"

"No, only amused. I fear, however, my opinion had not much weight with him, although——"

"I should think not," interposed Mr. Seymour, blandly; "for only a week or two ago I offered him fifty guineas for the same dog, and was refused!"

"Then I have indeed reason to congratulate myself as well as you," answered the young man, still addressing Mrs. Seymour, while a curious smile stole to his lip.

"How?" inquired the lady, in surprise.

"Because ultimately I obtained what I wished; and you are now the dog's mistress."

"Is it possible?" cried Mr. Seymour, in a tone of excessive astonishment. "Why, Lord Monkford assured me that he would not part with it for a thousand pounds!"

"Very likely," replied the young man, the same curious smile returning to his face.

"Is it not incomprehensible, my dear?" asked the gentleman, turning to his wife.

Mrs. Seymour bowed coldly, and her husband continued,—

"I am sure we owe our young friend here a thousand thanks for

having undertaken so disagreeable a task; really, Charles, you must allow me to express my own personal——"

A frown contracted Mr. Hastings' brow, and he quickly interrupted him by saying abruptly, "Would you not like to be introduced to your new pet, Mrs. Seymour?"

"You surely did not bring it with you," she remarked, in a more lively tone than she had yet used.

The young man laughed pleasantly. "Yes, I could not resist the temptation of presenting it to you myself; besides, Lord Monkford might have altered his mind, had I not kept him to his word."

"Then we must instantly see it," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, rising and ringing the bell.

In a few minutes the really beautiful little animal was ushered into the room, and after it had been duly looked at, admired, and caressed, Mrs. Seymour, taking advantage of her husband having been for a moment called away, laid her hand meaningly upon Charles Hastings' arm, and said in a low tone, "How is it that you succeeded where he failed?"

"Can you not guess, dear Mrs. Seymour?" replied the young man, gently.

"Of course Herbert had nothing to say to it?" she asked with quivering lips.

"Not directly; but it was for *his* sake that Lord Monkford agreed to give up his favourite."

"My poor injured son," groaned Mrs. Seymour, closing her eyes, and leaning back upon the sofa-cushions; "every one loved and respected him, except——," and she tightly pressed her lips together, and clasped her hands in impotent agony. "I scarcely imagined, however," she continued thoughtfully, when her emotion had somewhat subsided, "that a man of Lord Monkford's peculiar disposition would have been influenced by any such feelings."

"Oh, he is at heart an amiable man," rejoined Charles Hastings, quickly, "and notwithstanding his well-known tendency to misanthropy, and the general coldness and austerity of his deportment, he has penetration to discern, and wisdom to appreciate, the beauty and genuine consistency of a character such as Herbert's."

The young man spoke with much feeling, and Mrs. Seymour's eyes glistened with pleasure as she listened to his words; but ere she could reply, her husband returned to them, and the conversation at once ceased to be carried on in the same confidential strain.

A few days later found Mr. and Mrs. Seymour comfortably established in their house in Belgrave Square, where, amidst the constant and exciting whirl of gaiety and fashion, the society of vain, heartless pleasure-seekers, and the thousand snares of an ungodly world, it almost seemed as if Mrs. Seymour had learnt to bear with calm equanimity, if not indifference, the trial which at first threatened to weigh down her timid spirit, and render the remainder of her life unendurable, or at the best painful and irksome.

Still she could not forget; for, though she sedulously simulated good spirits, and vied with her fashionable acquaintances in the number and costliness of her brilliant entertainments; though she joined them in their frivolous pursuits, and listened with apparent interest to their contemplated schemes and festivities, and unhesitatingly gave her assistance in carrying them into execution, she was all the

while conscious of a dull, despairing feeling in her heart; a dim undefined something which would not let her rest; a vague, unsatisfied yearning for some unknown and hitherto unacknowledged good; a restless, uncertain desire to attain unto that peace which, like a river, flows into the souls of those who sit at the feet of the great Giver, and while drinking in the precious words of wisdom and meekness which fall from His lips, and gazing upon the ineffable loveliness of His countenance, unconsciously imbibe His spirit, and are changed into His image.

A fortnight passed away before Mrs. Seymour heard anything further of her son. Then she received, through Charles Hastings, a brief note from himself, written in a very illegible hand, and containing nothing beyond a few tenderly affectionate sentences, and a promise that he would soon write again, and explain why he had already suffered so much time to elapse without informing her of his movements.

The lady's heart was, on the whole, relieved by this communication, ambiguous though it appeared; and, obeying the dictates of her strong motherly feelings, she instantly sat down and wrote a long and loving answer to Herbert's note.

She had just finished, and was in the act of addressing it, when her husband entered the room in search of a book he had left there the previous day.

Wishing to prevent him from discovering how she was engaged, Mrs. Seymour nervously gathered her writing materials together, and tried to slip them unperceived into her desk. But her over-anxiety defeated its object; for, in her haste, she dropped Herbert's letter on the floor. Ere she could stoop to recover it, Mr. Seymour had stepped forward, and politely lifted it from the carpet. He was about to put it into her hand, when something in her perturbed and excited countenance seemed to arrest him, and he glanced for the first time at the handwriting. A half-suppressed exclamation burst from his lips as he recognised it, and he suddenly threw it from him with a gesture of excessive disgust, and, turning to his wife, observed angrily,—

"I am surprised that that young man should have had the presumption to write to you!"

Mrs. Seymour answered not; but her cheek grew a shade paler, and she tightly grasped the letter she had herself written in one hand, while with the other she steadied herself against the table. Her husband regarded her attentively for the space of a minute, and then proceeded in a calm, measured tone,—

"Of course, however, it is quite needless for me to warn you against taking the least notice of his letters. Your own sense of——"

"And why should I not?" asked the lady, confronting him with a pale, quivering face, while her lips grew white, and a strange unwonted light shot from her eye; "who is to prevent me from writing to my son as often as I please?"

"I *will*, if necessary," said her husband, in a low, firm voice. "But I am sure it will not be necessary," he went on, speaking in that tone of blended authority and kindness which she was rarely able to withstand. "I have never yet known you disregardful of my wishes, and I cannot believe that it is your intention to incur my serious displeasure by——"

"But this is the worst kind of tyranny," she exclaimed harshly, moving away from him as he endeavoured to take her hand.

"You are beginning to use very strong expressions, my love," returned the gentleman, with a smile of condescending indulgence; "but I understand what your feelings are, and can fortunately make every allowance. When you are less excited, you will doubtless view this matter differently. In the meantime"—here he again spoke in a slow, distinct voice of firmness and determination—"if that letter which you now hold in your hand is, as I conclude, a reply to the one you have so lately received, we will, if you see no objection, destroy it at once; for you must be conscious of the uselessness, and even absurdity, of commencing a correspondence which cannot be continued."

Mrs. Seymour's face flushed deep with pride, sorrow, and mortification; and she held her letter still tighter on hearing this proposal; but—alas for her powers of resistance!—another sentence or two decided its fate, and shortly afterwards she stood passively by, and witnessed its destruction, while she instinctively felt as if her last hope was in like manner extinguished, and forthwith there crept into her already over-burdened heart a fresh sense of loneliness and utter desolation.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HERBERT'S JOURNEY, AND ITS RESULT.

"Fear not the consequence of an upright deed;
More to be feared is sin, though it awhile succeed."

BEFORE Herbert had proceeded far on his journey, the weather, which had been wearing a decidedly threatening aspect all the morning, broke into a violent storm.

To him, however, it mattered little. He sat back in the carriage with folded arms and an absent meditative air, alike regardless of the thick murky atmosphere, the huge masses of black rolling clouds, and the torrents of rain, which called forth sundry maledictory expressions from many of his fellow-passengers.

Evening was approaching when at length the train stopped at Thorncome Junction, six miles from Lanchester. Finding on inquiry that he would have to wait several hours for the next train, Herbert decided on taking advantage of a coach which was just on the point of starting for that place.

As soon, therefore, as he had given a few hasty directions regarding his luggage, he hastened to secure the only remaining inside seat.

He had already paid his fare, and was stepping into the vehicle, when he was arrested by hearing a voice behind him asking in earnest, pleading tones of the guard,—

"Are you sure that I cannot be accommodated with a seat?"

"Quite sure, ma'am," answered the man, glibly; "you are just too late."

"What shall I do?" murmured the other voice, in accents of despair. "My daughter is lying dangerously ill at Lanchester, and if I miss this opportunity I may never see her alive."

"I am very sorry, ma'am," returned the man, more civilly, "but you should have been here sooner."

"Alas! I have only received her telegram within the last half-hour."

"Well, you see how it is; every seat is occupied," said the guard, advancing to close the door. "There is still an outside place, however, but——"

He stopped as a sharp gust of wind rushed past them, rudely divesting him of his hat, and nearly knocking him down by its violence.

Without pausing to hear more, Herbert turned quickly round, and saw in the dusky light an elderly woman, clad in widow's weeds, and with a pale delicate-looking face, drawing her shawl closely about her, and preparing to follow the guard's dubious and half-uttered suggestion.

The very sight of her was enough to awaken his sympathy; and with his usual courtesy and innate politeness, he moved a step towards her, and saying in a tone of respectful consideration, "Allow me to offer you this seat," assisted her into the coach, and before she

could recover from her surprise, or express a word of thanks, he had disappeared.

Two gentlemen, who sat opposite to each other, had been observing our hero's movements with some curiosity; and as they witnessed this act of kindness, they exchanged a meaning glance and smile, accompanied by a certain elevating of the eyebrows and curl of the lip sufficiently indicative of their personal sentiments; while another, a handsome and gentlemanly-looking young man, dressed in deep mourning, who occupied the farthest corner from the door, started out of an apparently absorbing reverie on hearing Herbert's voice, and with a swift look of expectancy he hastily arose, and tried to get a glimpse of the speaker. But he was too late, for nothing could be seen save the dim outline of Herbert's retreating figure; and the gentleman sank back in his seat again, murmuring half audibly, "It must be a mistake." After which he relapsed into his former state of mental abstraction.

Herbert meanwhile had taken possession of the only available space on the top of the coach, where, exposed to the pitiless storm, with no better protection than the almost questionable shelter of a small umbrella, he very soon began to experience unmistakable sensations of extreme weariness and discomfort; and long before the end of the journey he was thoroughly drenched.

Still, he did not once regret the step he had taken; and if a thought of his own uncomfortable position crossed his mind, it was only that he might congratulate himself on having been able to ward off a similar trial from the frail-looking widow, who but for him would herself have been suffering from exposure to the raging elements.

At last the heavy lumbering vehicle drew up at one of the principal hotels in Lanchester, where it deposited its passengers.

Cold and wet, and with a strange feeling of faintness for which he was unable to account, Herbert Seymour cautiously descended from his elevated situation, and on reaching the ground, found to his utter astonishment, and no little satisfaction, that James Gordon was waiting to receive him.

When he attempted to express his pleasure, however, he was suddenly seized with an attack of illness, such as rendered him perfectly speechless; and before James Gordon could spring forward, and give him the support of his strong arm, he had become insensible, and fallen heavily upon the pavement.

"And so it has come to this!" murmured the latter, as he gently raised the young man's prostrate form, and gazed with the tenderest solicitude into his countenance. "Here," he added, beckoning hastily to another man; "will you help me to carry this gentleman into the hotel?"

"Is anything the matter?" asked a kind voice at his side; and almost before the words were uttered, the handsome young stranger who had been one of the passengers in the Thorncome coach, notwithstanding the rain which still continued to pour, closed his umbrella; and handing it to a servant who followed him, bent down, and endeavoured to ascertain the real state of the case. By the light of the gas lamp, Herbert's features were distinctly revealed; and no sooner did the stranger's eye rest upon them, than he gave a hurried electrified start, and betrayed signs of powerful emotion.

But he repressed—though evidently not without an effort—the

exclamation which rose to his lips, and after looking for a moment with a scrutinising glance in James Gordon's face, quietly tendered his own services; and the young man was at once conveyed into the hotel, and laid on a couch in one of its most comfortable apartments. Then the stranger withdrew, promising to return immediately with a competent doctor.

The door had scarcely closed upon him, when Herbert's cheek assumed a more natural hue; and he began to show symptoms of returning consciousness.

"You are better now, sir," said James Gordon, in a voice of much feeling, as he opened his eyes, and regarded him with a look of recognition.

The young man smiled faintly, and tried to raise himself in order to discover where he was; but he quickly relinquished the attempt, and put his hand to his head, while an expression of intense suffering passed over his manly countenance.

"James," he said at length, speaking in feeble, hurried tones, "I must not remain here another moment."

"But, indeed, you *must*, sir," answered his companion, earnestly; "it would be madness for you to think of moving to-night. Perhaps by the morning——"

"If I delay until then," interrupted Herbert, I shall probably be far worse."

"Oh, I hope not, sir," ejaculated the other, in a tone of keen anxiety.

"I feel sure that this attack is the precursor of some illness," continued Herbert, "and the expense of staying here for an indefinite length of time under such circumstances, would be more than I could well afford."

James Gordon looked thoughtful. The idea of a Seymour having thus to calculate what his expenditure should be, seemed so strange to him, and at once thoroughly enlightened him as to Herbert's altered position.

"Do you understand me, James?" inquired Herbert, gently.

"I do, sir," was the expressive answer.

"There are a few things I should like to say to you while I am able," rejoined the young man, presently, and he proceeded to enter into some particulars which it was needful that James Gordon should be made acquainted with, and gave him one or two brief instructions how to act in the event of his apprehensions proving correct. "Now," he added wearily, closing his eyes, "I believe I must take your advice, my good friend, and leave everything in your hands, for I am totally unable to put forth any exertions on my own behalf, owing to this feeling of faintness which is again creeping over me."

James Gordon became really alarmed on perceiving the deadly pallor which had once more settled on the young man's face; and, hastily ringing the bell, he desired that another doctor might be sent for; but, to his unbounded thankfulness, before his request could be carried into effect, the stranger returned, accompanied by the gentleman he had himself gone in search of.

While the latter was engaged in attending to Herbert, James Gordon watched his slightest movement with the greatest anxiety; and *his* anxiety seemed to be fully shared by the stranger: indeed, it would have been difficult for an impartial observer to have decided which

of the two felt the greatest interest in the case, or entertained the warmest affection for the object of their care and solicitude.

More than once James Gordon fancied that the stranger's eyes were fixed upon him with an earnest, inquiring gaze, as if he would fain discover how he came to be thus intimately acquainted with Herbert.

At last he, the stranger, moved towards him, and asked in a low, suppressed voice, "Has Mr. Seymour any friends in Lanchester?"

"No, sir," replied James Gordon, looking up in visible surprise on hearing Herbert's name so confidently mentioned; "none at least," he added, correcting himself, "that I am aware of."

Might I, without appearing intrusive, ask you in what way you are connected with him?" inquired the other, with a slightly embarrassed air.

For the space of a few seconds, James Gordon hesitated; then he answered calmly—a sudden light breaking over his face—

"I shall be obliged by your regarding me as Mr. Seymour's servant."

"I am sure you are attached to him," observed the gentleman, thoughtfully.

"You are right, sir. I owe him more than I can express."

"And I," cried the stranger, eagerly; but he hastily checked himself; and, glancing at Herbert, who still lay in a state of semi-unconsciousness, added in a different tone, "Do you not think it would be well for me to inform his father?"

"No, no, sir," interrupted James Gordon, hurriedly; "I have been particularly warned against taking this step."

"Ah!" exclaimed his companion, looking keenly at him. "Is Mr. Seymour as unreasonable and despotic as ever?" he asked in a lower key; "I mean of course the father."

"Far worse," was his companion's reply.

"Your friend is sleeping now, Sir Edward," said the doctor, softly, approaching them.

"Then you really know Mr. Herbert," observed James Gordon, in a voice of pleased surprise; for the stranger's frank and gentlemanly aspect had already produced a favourable impression upon him.

"Yes, thank God," was the fervent response. I *do* know him. But for the disinterested generosity of his noble nature—the bravery and heroism which led him to perform an action such as few would have attempted—I should not now have been here. *He saved my life at the risk of his own!*"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

RETURNED CONSCIOUSNESS, AND A RELAPSE.

"How wild and dim this life appears!
One long, deep, heavy sigh,
When o'er our eyes, half closed in tears,
The images of former years
Are faintly glittering by!" PROFESSOR WILSON.

WHEN James Gordon mentioned Herbert's wish to be at once removed to his own cottage in the outskirts of the town, the doctor expressed his decided disapproval of the plan, and said he would not be answerable for the consequences, should it be carried into execution.

This caused the former no little perplexity, besides placing him in a very awkward position; for he could not, of course, without entering into at least a partial explanation of Herbert's affairs, offer any satisfactory reason for his unwillingness to remain in the hotel longer than was absolutely necessary.

After a lengthened consultation, however, it was finally arranged that the young man should be immediately conveyed to the house of Sir Edward Stanley, who, as my readers will have already conjectured, proved to be no other than the lad whose life Herbert had been instrumental in saving while they were both staying at B——. Accordingly he was lifted into a carriage which had in the meantime been prepared for him under Sir Edward's careful superintendence, and slowly driven to the latter's residence, where he was surrounded with every comfort, and kindly and tenderly nursed during the long and serious illness that followed.

For his own expectations were unfortunately verified. An alarming fever succeeded the first painful attack of mental and physical prostration, and for a whole fortnight his life was despaired of.

At the end of that period, the doctor—who had been watching the case with extreme anxiety, and was most assiduous in his attendance, instead of evading Sir Edward's eager questions, or merely answering them by an ominous shake of the head as he had hitherto done, informed him that some of the worst symptoms having subsided, he could now speak with comparative hopefulness of Herbert's ultimate recovery.

"There has been a severe and protracted struggle between life and death," added the doctor, gravely; "and, unless your friend had possessed a remarkably strong and vigorous constitution, he must certainly have succumbed, in spite of all human skill."

"He is still insensible," remarked Sir Edward, anxiously.

"True; but I have reason to believe that as the delirium has quite ceased he will soon be restored to consciousness: although I must warn you, that in consequence of the terrible shock his whole system has sustained, his progress towards convalescence will probably be very slow and variable."

And the doctor was right; for on the evening of the following day a

change came over Herbert's features; signs of returning consciousness began to be visible upon the pale, wasted countenance, that had already seemed to be stamped with the impress of death; and after a slight fluttering movement of the hand, and a scarcely perceptible contraction of the brow, his eyes opened and wandered round the room, as if searching for some familiar object.

But everything was strange to him, from the large well-furnished apartment—half sleeping, half sitting room—with its deep oriel windows, one of which opened into a small conservatory filled with the choicest flowers, to the stately-looking widow lady, who sat in an easy-chair at some distance from the bed, her small white hand resting negligently upon the open page of a book lying on her lap, and her eyes gazing fixedly into the fire.

Unbroken silence reigned in that sick room for a minute; then Herbert sighed heavily, for even the momentary exertion of thinking was too much for him in his present enfeebled state. The lady looked quickly up as she caught the sound, and rising from her seat noiselessly approached the bed. Herbert regarded her with a wondering, confused look, and was about to speak; but after glancing at him she suddenly turned and left the room, and directly afterwards James Gordon took her place.

"Is that you, James?" said Herbert, a pleased expression coming over his face.

"It is, sir," replied the other, feeling almost overpowered with joy and gratitude at seeing his beloved friend once more restored to sense and reason.

"I thought I must be dreaming," continued Herbert, in a faint voice; "have I been long ill?".

"Yes; but you will soon get up your strength now, sir."

Nothing more passed between them that night; for the experienced nurse, who had been recruiting her exhausted frame by taking a few hours' rest in another part of the house, now came to resume her accustomed duties in the sick chamber: and, by an imperative gesture, prevented James Gordon from seeking to carry on the conversation; and Herbert, finding himself already much fatigued, obediently swallowed the draught she offered him, and almost immediately fell into a calm, refreshing slumber.

When he awoke, it was morning—a beautiful spring morning.

The nurse had disappeared, but James Gordon and Sir Edward Stanley were both in the room, although the latter could not at once be perceived, in consequence of his being partially hidden by one of the curtains.

"James," said Herbert, quite unconscious that the apartment had any other occupant, "I want you to tell me where we are."

"You remember being taken ill when you first arrived at Lanchester," observed the other gently.

"Yes: but this house? everything seems so strange to me. And the lady I saw last night—who is she, James?"

"She is the mother of an old friend of yours—Sir Edward Stanley—and it is in her house we are staying."

"Edward Stanley," returned Herbert, musingly. "*Sir* Edward," he repeated, looking questioningly at his companion; "I certainly have a dim perception of having occasionally seen a face here not altogether unknown to me, but——"

"You surely have not forgotten me, Herbert?" exclaimed Sir Edward, wholly unable to restrain himself longer. "Did you not hear," he went on in an explanatory tone, "of the death of my dear father?"

"No," whispered Herbert, feebly returning the pressure of his friend's hand; "but I can feel for you, my poor Edward, for I too"—he softly murmured to himself—"have lost a father, though not by death."

A shade of intense gravity overshadowed his pallid countenance, as he thus alluded to his own desolate condition; and Sir Edward exchanged a significant glance with James Gordon, while he laid his hand lightly upon Herbert's forehead, with a mute expression of sympathy and affection.

Fortunately the entrance of the doctor put a stop to the conversation, which might otherwise soon have merged into some exciting topic; and it was not renewed until the evening, when, at Herbert's request, Sir Edward entered into fuller details of all that had occurred since the commencement of his illness.

"I shall never be able to repay you for the trouble and anxiety I have caused you," said Herbert, after silently listening to his explanation.

"Ah, you would not speak to me in this strain, Herbert, if you had any conception of the thankfulness with which I hailed the opportunity of being of use to you," returned the other, in a voice of deep earnestness. "Have *you* yet to learn," he added tremulously, "that the devotion of a lifetime would scarcely suffice to cancel the debt I——"

"Pray do not again allude to that subject," interposed Herbert, hastily. "I only did what you or any other person similarly circumstanced would have done; and it gives me no pleasure to be reminded of it."

"Oh, your brave magnanimous spirit naturally leads you to make light of it; but I cannot so easily forget."

"I would not have you *forget*," said his sick friend, slowly and seriously. "God's preserving mercy, on the occasion to which you refer, well deserves to be had in continual remembrance—thank *Him*, dear Edward."

"I do," was the low-spoken, though fervent response.

Herbert looked at him for a minute or two without speaking, his countenance, meanwhile, assuming a grave, thoughtful expression; then laying his hand kindly upon Sir Edward's, he asked, in those gentle winning tones which had so often found their way into the hearts of others,—

"Do you belong to Him, Stanley? Are you one of His servants?"

"Oh," replied Sir Edward, with a deep-drawn breath, and a wistful, eager gaze, "I hope so; but——" He paused.

"Is there any doubt?" inquired Herbert, almost in a whisper.

The young man gave utterance to a weary sigh, while his cheek flushed painfully, and he seemed for half a second to be battling with his natural timid irresolution and reserve.

"I scarcely know how to answer you," he said at length, in a low, agitated voice—carefully avoiding Herbert's eye—"my experience is such a strange and varied one."

"*Varied* it must of course be," said Herbert, with an encouraging

smile; "for this is a changing world, and we ourselves are changing creatures; but why *strange*, dear Edward?"

"Because, although I have for a considerable time been seeking deliverance from the bondage of sin, I am still deeply conscious of my many shortcomings."

"It would grieve me to hear you say otherwise," observed Herbert.

"But that is not all," continued the young man, mournfully. "I find myself daily, almost hourly, exposed to innumerable and peculiar temptations, such as I am often utterly unable to withstand; while the fierce conflict which is continually taking place in my own heart—the terrible struggle between faith and sense, religion and reason, justice and justification—the light of nature and the light of the Gospel—well-nigh make me despair of obtaining anything like settled peace. No sooner is one difficulty solved, than another presents itself; and, though I may happily escape one form of temptation, it is only to be assailed by a more specious and bewildering kind."

"Yours is, indeed, a peculiarly trying position," replied Herbert, thoughtfully, "and yet hundreds are similarly tried."

"Do you really think so?" asked the other earnestly. "I sometimes fear lest I should be conquered at last; for though I know and even *love* what is good, evil thoughts *will* obtrude themselves on my mind, and unbelieving doubts and fears shake my confidence in God's Word, and too often, alas! lead me to mistrust His love."

"I am glad you have told me this, Edward," said Herbert, after a pause; "we will try to be a mutual help to each other. Perhaps when I get a little stronger I may be permitted——"

"You are feeling worse, Herbert!" cried Sir Edward, hastily starting from his seat close to the bed, and beckoning to the nurse, who had retired into a small ante-room. "How could I be so selfish?" he murmured in accents of self-reproach. "I might have foreseen this."

"Do not be alarmed," whispered Herbert; "I shall be better presently."

"Here, take this, sir," said the nurse, administering a little wine and water. "Did I not tell you what would happen if you allowed him to become excited?" she went on, turning to Sir Edward, and speaking in an aggrieved tone; "and did you not promise me——" A glance finished the sentence.

"Yes, I am greatly to blame," replied the young man, looking regretfully down on his friend, who now lay pale and breathless upon the pillow. "Shall we send for the doctor?" he asked in a suppressed voice.

The nurse watched with some anxiety the change which had so suddenly come over Herbert's face, but on hearing Sir Edward's question, she turned quickly round, and answered hurriedly, "I fear it will be necessary, for I am by no means satisfied with his present appearance."

Almost before the words were spoken, Sir Edward had withdrawn, and within a quarter of an hour the doctor stood at Herbert's bedside.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE PRAYER OF FAITH.

DR. GIBSON looked very grave when he saw his patient, and immediately proceeded to retract his former favourable prognostications by freely confessing that he considered Herbert's life in imminent danger.

The powerful remedies he applied seemed indeed to have little effect in averting the impending evil, or lessening his apprehensions by removing any of the symptoms which caused them all so much anxiety and alarm.

About an hour previous to this serious relapse, Herbert had insisted on being permitted to write the short note which I have alluded to in a former chapter to his mother: and James Gordon, knowing his wishes on the subject, took the earliest opportunity of despatching it, after addressing it, according to his own request, to his friend Charles Hastings.

Dr. Gibson, on more than one occasion during the long wearisome days and nights that followed without any apparent signs of amendment, suggested the propriety of sending for Mr. Seymour; but Sir Edward, to whom, while wandering in the solemn and mysterious regions of delirium, Herbert had unconsciously revealed all that had passed between that gentleman and himself, did not deem it advisable to expose him to further insult. It certainly once occurred to him, that Mr. Seymour's stern pride *might* be subdued and melted, and his fatherly affection revived, at the sight of his suffering son; but he felt that, however desirable such a reunion would be under other circumstances, it was at best a most remote and uncertain conjecture, and might probably have a totally opposite termination from what he wished or intended; in which case, so far from rendering his poor friend a service, he would be doing him a positive injury.

On making known his sentiments to James Gordon, he found that they were fully shared by him; for the latter, having himself had some experience of Mr. Seymour's harsh, unforgiving disposition, was even less sanguine than Sir Edward of any good resulting from following the doctor's advice.

It was therefore decided that (notwithstanding the weight of responsibility which, in the event of their worst fears being realized, would be imposed upon Sir Edward), unless Herbert expressed a wish to the contrary, his unnatural father should still be kept in ignorance of his precarious condition.

He, poor fellow, was by this time incapable of giving an opinion on either side. His cheeks were crimsoned with a deep hectic flush, and though no longer troubled by the fantastic delirious visions which had hitherto been a prominent feature in his illness, it was evident that his brain was in that strange comatose state of dangerous insensibility, when human skill and science are alike defied, and pleasure and pain both utterly powerless to arouse the sufferer, or replace reason on her deserted throne.

Thus passed away many days.

All the aid that medical knowledge and experience could afford was given; two celebrated London physicians having been summoned to assist Dr. Gibson (himself no mean practitioner) with their advice and co-operation.

At last the hour arrived when, after fruitlessly trying all the remedies usually found most successful in such cases, they retired with Dr. Gibson into another room.

Half an hour later the latter returned to Herbert's bedside alone, and, in answer to the questioning looks of Sir Edward Stanley and James Gordon—albeit he only ventured a passing glance at their troubled countenances—uttered those painfully significant words, which often fall like a death-knell upon the hearts of many a loving watcher, dispelling in an instant their fairest visions, withering their brightest and most fondly cherished flowers, making their sun set in the darkness of despair,—

"*There is no hope!*"

An agonized expression swept like a wintry cloud over James Gordon's face; but whatever his personal feelings may have been—and we know that his attachment to Herbert was of no common kind—he controlled them. Adversity had taught him more than one stern, though salutary lesson, and he was able to force back the tide of wild, ungovernable emotion which few, save himself, could have resisted, and bury his grief deep within his own breast.

Not so Sir Edward. He looked and felt profoundly wretched, and made no effort to restrain his sorrow until checked by the doctor, who laid his hand gently upon his shoulder, and then pointed meaningly to the bed.

"Is there nothing you can do for him?" asked the young man, in an imploring whisper.

"Nothing that has not been already done," returned Dr. Gibson, gloomily.

Sir Edward moved aside, and covering his face with his hands, groaned inwardly.

Suddenly he felt a light touch on his arm, and looking down perceived Lady Stanley at his side.

"Edward, will you come with me?" she breathed in his ear; "you can do your poor friend no good by remaining here."

"Alas! I know it," he answered sadly; "still I cannot leave him."

"But you need rest yourself, my son," she said, earnestly.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, almost reproachfully; "how could I rest while he lies thus?"

"If you could be of any service," she began half deprecatingly, half beseechingly—but Sir Edward turned from her with a gesture of impatience, and after casting an awe-stricken glance at Herbert's inanimate form, she hastily motioned to Dr. Gibson to follow her, and glided from the room, apparently convinced of the uselessness of pursuing the subject further.

Scarcely had they departed, when James Gordon softly approached him, and, taking up a Bible which he found on the table opened it, and seemed for several minutes quite engrossed in turning over the pages, as if in search of some particular passage.

"This is a terrible trial to us both, Gordon," said Sir Edward, in a husky voice.

But, to his surprise, these words elicited no reply; James Gordon did not even appear to have heard him, so absorbed was he in his occupation. Sir Edward watched him for a moment, as with bent head and trembling fingers, which could with difficulty perform their office, he rapidly ran his eye along one page after another, before finding what he sought. Then drawing a step nearer, he asked in a voice of sudden interest, "Are you looking for any particular passage?"

"I have it!" exclaimed the other, drawing a long breath of satisfaction. "I knew I had often seen it, although I could not recollect where it was to be found. Here," he added, putting the Bible into Sir Edward's hand, and pointing with trembling eagerness to the verse in question, "read that, sir."

The young man started, and a strange perplexed look took possession of his face, as his eye fell upon the words, "*And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.*"

"Well?" said Sir Edward, with a wistful, questioning gaze.

James Gordon did not answer; but, taking the Bible into his own hand again, he opened it at the eighteenth chapter of St. Matthew, and gravely directed his attention to our Saviour's promise: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

"O Gordon, what do you mean?" cried Sir Edward, in a low, agitated voice; "do you think——" He paused, and read the verse once more, while a bright light flashed from his eye, and his pale lip quivered with emotion. "Do you think," he went on hurriedly, "that it has any reference to such a case as this?"

"Why not, sir? Man's extremity is God's opportunity, you know; and now when all human aid is vain"—here he glanced almost imperceptibly towards the bed—"we should lay our case at the feet of the Great Physician, who has not only the will, but the power, to do for us even more than we can desire."

"You are right, Gordon," returned Sir Edward, eagerly, "quite right. Come with me," he added, after a moment's consideration; and hastily seizing his companion by the wrist, he drew him out of the room; and did not once release his hold until, having traversed a long passage, and finally ascended a flight of steps, they reached Sir Edward's own apartment. Then loosening his grasp, he locked the door, and turning to James Gordon, said, with the simplicity of a child, "Now, my friend, shall we take Him at His word?"

"Yes," rejoined the other, in a voice of tremulous solemnity; "but let us first remind ourselves of the condition which is attached to the promise."

"I know," exclaimed Sir Edward, quickly; "it is *the prayer of faith!*" and his face was lighted up by an expression of such calm confidence, and earnest, unshaken trust, that James Gordon marvelled at the sight, and was himself wondrously encouraged and strengthened thereby.

What afterwards passed in that room God only knows!

He heard the petitions offered—the devout breathings of simple believing prayer. He saw the tearful eyes raised heavenward, the hands clasped together in agonizing supplication, the hearts blending in holy unison, pervaded by the same loving spirit, sustained by the same animating hope, while pleading the same precious promise.

He saw, He heard all this, and more, and from His lofty throne in the highest heaven He stooped to breathe into the ear of these two praying ones the gracious words,—

"According to your faith be it unto you."

And they rose from their knees with David's song of triumph on their lips:—

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.

"I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

"They looked unto Him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed.

"*The Lord hath heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.*"

CHAPTER XXX.

HOPE DEFERRED.

"Let us be patient! These severe afflictions
Not from the ground arise,
But oftentimes celestial benedictions
Assume this dark disguise." LONGFELLOW.

It would not, I believe, have occasioned Sir Edward Stanley or James Gordon the least surprise had they been informed on their return to the sick room that Herbert had risen from his bed during their absence, so firm was their conviction that the prayers they had offered on his behalf would be answered.

But in reply to their eager question whether any favourable change had yet taken place, the nurse shook her head, murmuring as much to herself as them, "No, nor ever will in this world!"

"O Mason!" said Sir Edward, not even daunted by such a disheartening report, "I hope we shall find that you are mistaken."

"Well, I hope so too; but I confess I see little chance of it," she answered rather tartly; for, although a general favourite in the Stanley family, and invaluable as a nurse, she had her peculiarities, one of which consisted of a strong dislike to hear her opinion called in question on any point, however slight, and a morbid propensity to take offence where none was intended, and feel herself intensely aggrieved at the bare idea of any one presuming to dispute her authority in the sick room, which she was wont to regard as her own undisputed territory.

On this occasion she spoke truly in asserting that there was no probability of her conclusion proving erroneous. The most sprightly imagination would have failed to detect any visible improvement in Herbert's appearance; for he still lay in the same state of death-like torpor and rigid insensibility, and his scarcely breathing form furnished little room for doubt as to the speedy termination of his illness.

"You see it's quite impossible that he can hold out much longer," whispered Mason; "for the system is gradually sinking. But," she added, with the view of alleviating her young master's grief, "Dr. Gibson says he will most likely pass away without any suffering, and *that*, you know, is a great comfort."

A weary, pained look crossed Sir Edward's face, and he glanced uneasily over at James Gordon, as if imploring his help.

The latter was instantly at his side, murmuring softly, "Is anything too hard for the Lord? With men this is impossible; but with God *all things* are possible."

"Thank you, my friend," said Sir Edward, smiling faintly. "You make me ashamed of my own faithlessness. A short time since," he went on, passing his hand hastily across his eyes, and speaking in suppressed accents of self-accusation, "I felt as if *nothing* could shake my confidence, or disturb my hope; and now you see how it

is with me: because the Lord does not vouchsafe an immediate answer to my request, I am almost tempted to give up in despair."

"Ah! *praying* is sometimes easier then *waiting*," observed James Gordon, soothingly; "but the latter is necessary as well as the former."

"Yes, I had not thought of that," returned Sir Edward, thoughtfully. "David says, 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.'"

"And shall *we* not echo his words, and say, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope'?"

"Gordon, I wish I had a portion of your steadfastness of character, said Sir Edward, abruptly.

"O sir, do not speak thus!" exclaimed the other, an expression of real pain passing over his grave, weather-beaten countenance. "You little know what I really am," he continued, with unfeigned sadness and humility. "There are passages in my past life which I would fain blot out from memory's page, were it possible to do so, and which, if breathed in your ear, would have the effect of entirely altering your feelings towards me."

"Not so, Gordon," replied Sir Edward, warmly; "I should honour you the more, knowing what difficulties you must have overcome before arriving at your present state of happiness."

James Gordon shook his head; but as no other reply suggested itself to his mind, he remained for a short time reflectingly silent. Then suddenly raising his eyes to Sir Edward's face, he said earnestly,—

"Now, sir, will you not leave everything in God's hands, and go to your own room, and lie down for a few hours?"

"It would be useless, Gordon; I could not sleep."

"But, indeed, sir, you must try," returned the other quickly; "for your mother's sake," he added, in a tone of persuasion; "it is getting late, you know, and she is naturally anxious about you. I will watch by Mr. Herbert, and let you know if there is any change."

"Well, on that condition I yield," said the young man, after a little hesitation; and without venturing another glance at the unconscious occupant of the bed, he softly withdrew.

Before following James Gordon's advice, however, he repaired to the drawing-room, where he found his mother on the point of retiring for the night. A few words sufficed to allay her fears regarding himself, and atone for his previous disregard of her wishes; and this matter being arranged to her perfect satisfaction, he left her, feeling greatly in need of rest, the severe mental excitement which he had experienced having by this time given place to a most depressing state of physical exhaustion.

After tossing for an hour or two restlessly upon his pillow, Sir Edward fell into a profound slumber, from which he did not awake until late the following morning.

Springing hastily up, he inquired of the first servant he met whether there was any news from the sick room; but finding that the latter could give him no reliable information, he lost no time in going to find out how matters stood with his poor friend.

As he was cautiously approaching the door, it suddenly opened, and Dr. Gibson came towards him. He looked grave and preoccupied, and would, I think, have passed him without the least sign of re-

cognition, had not the young man arrested him by laying his hand detainingly upon his arm.

"Good morning, my dear sir!" exclaimed the doctor, starting slightly; "I ought to apologise for my abstraction."

"Have you nothing to say to me?" asked Sir Edward, in a husky voice of emotion.

"Well," said the other hesitatingly, "he is still alive——"

"Is that all?" said Sir Edward, with unconcealed disappointment.

"It is far more than I anticipated," replied Dr. Gibson, fixing his eyes upon the opposite wall; "I did not expect him to survive the night."

"Must you leave him, doctor?"

"If I could be of any use to him, I would of course gladly remain; but as it is, my duty imperatively calls me elsewhere."

"But you will come back in the course of the day?" said Sir Edward earnestly, observing that the doctor seemed in haste to be gone.

"Certainly, if you desire it; although I assure you my presence is by no means so indispensable as you imagine, for Mrs. Mason knows precisely what course to adopt, and will, I am persuaded, implicitly follow the instructions I have given her."

"Then I need not detain you longer," rejoined Sir Edward, moving aside to let him pass. "It may be," he added musingly, "that the Lord will yet condescend to listen to our prayers, and *if not*, we must learn to say, 'Thy will be done.' Meanwhile I will carry the case once more to the throne of grace."

Accordingly he retraced his steps, and instead of entering Herbert's room, as he had at first intended, returned to his own apartment.

CHAPTER XXXI.

GOD'S WAYS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT.

"Sure, 'tis a serious thing to die, my soul!
What a strange moment must it be, when near
Thy journey's end, thou hast the gulf in view." BLAIR.

LATER in the day Lady Stanley (probably at Dr. Gibson's recommendation) sent off a telegraphic message—without informing Sir Edward of her intention—to Mr. Seymour, apprising him of Herbert's dangerous condition, and requesting his immediate presence at Lanchester.

This communication elicited no reply; but after despatching another, and more urgent one, she received towards evening the following laconic answer:—

"Mr. and Mrs. Seymour leave London to-morrow, *en route* for Constantinople. Mr. Seymour is therefore obliged to decline the honour assigned to him by Lady Stanley."

The lady's cheek crimsoned with indignation as her eye glanced over the paper, and she tore it in several pieces, and was in the act of flinging it into the grate, when she heard Sir Edward's footsteps approaching.

"Mother!" he exclaimed, coming towards her with outstretched arms, and speaking in tones of glad excitement, "I bring you good news; Herbert is decidedly better."

"Are you not deceiving yourself, my dear Edward?" she asked doubtingly; "Dr. Gibson——"

"I know," interrupted the young man, smiling slightly, "he despaired long ago."

"Not without reason, I fear," remarked the lady, casting a furtive glance at the scraps of paper, which were still unconsumed.

"Then we have the greater cause for gratitude," said her son, in a low, earnest voice of deep emotion.

"Yes," replied Lady Stanley, hesitatingly, "*if* your conclusions are well founded."

"Will you not come and see for yourself?" asked Sir Edward, springing from the chair into which he had just thrown himself.

"Willingly," she answered, with a pensive smile: "I am already much interested in the young man, and should be delighted to think his life might be spared."

"He is perfectly sensible," whispered Sir Edward, pausing for a moment at the door of the sick room.

Lady Stanley moved back a step. "If I had been aware of that," she said, "I would not have come; for the sight of a stranger will certainly agitate him."

"No, no!" returned her son eagerly; "*you* will not disturb him in the slightest degree. He told James Gordon, the first day he saw you, that you reminded him of his own mother."

But Lady Stanley was not to be persuaded.

"If he continues to improve," she said, "I shall soon have an opportunity of seeing him; but just at present he should be kept perfectly quiet, and free from the least excitement."

"Indeed, my lady, you are right," exclaimed Mason, coming out of an adjoining room with a wine-glass containing some colourless fluid in her hand; "I cannot even allow Sir Edward to enter the room until——"

"O Mason, how absurd!" cried the young man, looking annoyed; "surely *I* can do no harm."

Mason made no reply; but the expression of her face plainly showed that her mind was quite made up.

"I will not utter a word," continued Sir Edward, in a tone of remonstrance; "all I want is to be near my poor friend."

"Well, sir, I am sorry to disappoint you," returned the old woman, shaking her head with an air of importance; "but if you really wish the young gentleman to recover, you had better follow my counsel;" and she moved resolutely past him, as if determined to turn a dea fear to all further remonstrance or entreaties.

"You must be patient, my dear Edward," said Lady Stanley, putting her hand on his arm, and drawing him away. "When Dr. Gibson comes, you will be able to ask *his* opinion; and in the meantime it would be very unreasonable to wish to do anything which might prove injurious to your friend."

Sir Edward could not but acknowledge the truth of this remark, although he felt greatly inclined to rebel against being so summarily dismissed from Herbert's presence just at the moment when all the care and anxiety he had lavished on him seemed about to meet with a rich reward.

But he was obliged to submit; for Dr. Gibson, surprised—nay, even startled—at the favourable, and to him inexplicable and wholly unexpected change which had taken place in his patient during his absence, highly approved of all the precautionary measures Mason adopted, and began himself to watch the case with renewed interest and concentrated attention, in order to become thoroughly conversant with the peculiarities of Herbert's constitution, and discover how he could render him the most efficient aid, and assist in promoting his recovery.

Not until several weeks had elapsed did he see reason to congratulate himself on having successfully accomplished his task—so gradual and uncertain was the change from sickness to comparative health.

"I fear you have found me a very troublesome patient," said Herbert, greeting the doctor with a sweet smile, when he visited him one morning, according to his usual custom.

"How are you to-day?" asked the other, as he felt his pulse.

"Well, quite well," was the cheerful rejoinder.

"Hum! why do you always say that?" inquired the doctor, moving back a few paces, snd regarding him with a fixed look of earnest scrutiny.

"Do I?" exclaimed Herbert, in visible surprise.

"Yes, when you were as weak as an infant, and scarcely able to articulate a word, you were still 'quite well,' according to your own account."

"Ah," replied the young man—and Dr. Gibson marvelled greatly at the bright serenity of his countenance, the grave, unearthly sweet-

ness of the smile that trembled over lip and brow, and spoke from the depths of his large, dark eye,—"*then* I was momentarily expecting to enter within the portals of that glorious City, where the inhabitants no more say they are sick."

"Can you honestly affirm," asked the doctor, incredulously, "that you could really welcome death?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Herbert, in a slow tone of consideration; "why should I not, my friend?"

"Why *should* you rather?" exclaimed the doctor, a look of impenetrable gloom overshadowing his face.

Herbert looked kindly and questioningly at him; then he said quietly, "Does not the weary traveller welcome rest, and the exiled son exult in being once more permitted to approach his much-loved home? and can you wonder that I, too, in like manner, rejoice in the glorious prospect of laying aside these shackles of mortality, and changing the darkness and sorrow of a sin-stained world for the unending felicity and unfading brightness and purity of that true home of the soul which awaits me in my Father's house above?"

"Strange," muttered the doctor, knitting his brow, and eyeing the young man with unequivocal astonishment. "It is not often," he went, on, rising from his seat, and speaking in a tone of affected indifference, "that my patients manifest such readiness to relinquish the things of this present life, and rush into the dark mysterious regions of that strange and incomprehensible existence which lies beyond us."

Herbert raised himself on his elbow, and regarded him with a look of such grave pitying earnestness, and eager and wistful inquiry, that Dr. Gibson's eyes involuntarily fell in confusion. At length, however, resuming his former manner, he asked abruptly,—

"Are you sorry to find yourself recovering?"

"No," replied Herbert, once more lying back on his pillow, and closing his eyes; "I can still say 'it is well.'

'God's ways are always right,
And love is o'er them all,
Though far above our sight.'

What I know not now, I shall know hereafter."

An interval of silence succeeded; then Herbert, fancying that Dr. Gibson had gone, repeated in a low, clear voice, as if thinking aloud, the first two verses of one of his favourite hymns:—

"Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.
If life be long, I will be glad,
That I may long obey;
If short, yet why should I be sad
To soar to endless day?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms
Than He went through before;
He that unto God's kingdom comes,
Must enter by His door.

Come, Lord, when grace has made me meet
Thy blessed face to see;
For if Thy work on earth be sweet,
What will Thy glory be?"

After listening thus far, Dr. Gibson, with a bitter smile upon his lips, and a miserable feeling at his heart, quietly stole out of the room. He professed to have no sympathy with what he termed religious enthusiasm; for he was of the world—careless and unconcerned, cold, listless, and indifferent about his soul; wandering in a state of profound moral darkness, and yet ignorant of his blinded condition; contemptuously rejecting the dull, lifeless, insipid pleasures of the earth, and yet refusing to replace them by those freely offered, solid, life-inspiring, soul-satisfying joys which are at God's right hand—despising the shadow, and yet making no effort to obtain the substance; fully convinced of the worthlessness of the world's best smiles, the hollowness of its fairest promises, the fleeting nature of its brightest visions, and yet a stranger to all that is good, and true, and abiding—godless and hopeless in the world!

Still he was not happy—how indeed could he be? Often, as he stood by the bed of those who were appointed to die, and listened to their agonising, oft-repeated cry for mercy, and witnessed their last painful struggles with the King of Terrors, and their frantic eagerness to remain yet a little longer upon earth, he felt uneasy, perturbed, and oppressed in spirit, while occasionally the solemn thought flashed across his mind: "How will it be with *me*, when I, too, shall hear the awful summons, Set thine house in order; *for thou shalt die, and not live?*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

RECOVERY.

"O star of strength! I see thee stand
And smile upon my pain;
Thou beckonest with thy mailed hand.
And I am strong again." LONGFELLOW.

IT was a happy day for Sir Edward Stanley when Herbert made his first appearance in the drawing-room, leaning on the arm of James Gordon.

He still looked pale and thin, and his countenance bore unmistakable traces of recent illness; but he smilingly assured Lady Stanley, on her expressing her fears lest the exertion of walking should prove too much for him, that, but for Dr. Gibson's stringent orders to the contrary, he should have left his room days before.

"Indeed," he continued with emotion, "I have already trespassed far too long on your kindness, and the least I can now do is to relieve you of my presence as soon as possible."

Lady Stanley left her seat at the other end of the room, and came and sat on a low chair near his couch, as she answered gently, yet decidedly, "My dear Mr. Seymour, you must on no account talk of leaving us for some time to come; at present it would be both a foolish and dangerous experiment, and one which would cause us all much disappointment."

"You are very, very kind," responded Herbert, feelingly.

"*Kind!*" she repeated, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking earnestly into his face. "Shall I ever be able to repay you for saving my dear Edward's life?"

"That debt, if debt it was, has been repaid a thousandfold," exclaimed Herbert, with energy.

"What is *your* opinion?" she asked, turning round, and addressing her son, who stood leaning on the back of her chair.

"Herbert knows my ideas on the subject," he replied, smiling significantly, "but he never admits that I am right."

"I suppose," said Herbert, softly and hesitatingly, after pausing for a few minutes—apparently in consideration—and Lady Stanley could see the colour slowly mounting to his pallid cheeks while putting the question—"I suppose you did not think it necessary to inform my—I mean" (checking himself) "Mr. Seymour, of my illness?"

"No," answered Sir Edward, promptly; but his mother interrupted him by saying, in a tone which showed that she could quite enter into his feelings, though she had acted contrary to his wishes, "At one particular stage of your illness I certainly did take the responsibility of making him acquainted with——"

"O mother!" cried Sir Edward, half reproachfully; "I thought we had decided that no step of the kind should be taken."

Lady Stanley shook her head. "I do not think we should have

been justified in withholding such important information," she answered gravely; "so near a relative ought under any circumstances to have at least *the option* of visiting his son."

"Did he send any reply?" asked Herbert, with breathless anxiety.

"Yes," returned the lady, shunning his earnest, inquiring gaze; "he said they were on the point of starting for Constantinople, and that he was therefore unfortunately obliged to give up the idea of coming to see you."

It did not require any very active stretch of the imagination to enable Herbert to perceive that to spare his feelings Lady Stanley had represented the case in as favourable a light as she possibly could for Mr. Seymour.

"It was very kind of you to take so much trouble," he said, in a voice of suppressed agitation; "but I knew it could be productive of no real satisfaction;" and he gave utterance to a deep, involuntary sigh. "You are perhaps aware," he remarked presently, evidently speaking with a great effort, "that I do not again return to Mertonsville?"

"We guessed as much," replied Sir Edward, in tones of indignation.

"After the extreme kindness I have received from you, it is only right that I should explain to you how I am situated."

"Some other time you can tell us all you think necessary," said Lady Stanley, soothingly; "but until you become thoroughly strong, you should dismiss every painful subject from your mind, and dwell only on those things which are calculated to cheer, instead of depressing you. Here is Dr. Gibson," she added, rising from her seat with a smile as the door opened, and that gentleman was ushered into the room. "I am sure," lowering her voice, "if we were to ask him, we should find that he fully coincides in this opinion."

"I have been visiting a patient two doors off," remarked the doctor, bowing low to Lady Stanley, and then passing on to Herbert's sofa; "and hearing from Mr. Seymour's servant, whom I accidentally met, that his master had just walked downstairs, I thought I would take the opportunity of calling to ascertain whether he had suffered from the exertion."

"My servant!" exclaimed Herbert, opening his eyes wide with astonishment, and half rising from the recumbent position he had been occupying. "*My* servant," he repeated, ignoring the latter part of the doctor's observation, "to whom do you refer?"

"To whom? James Gordon of course! and a very extraordinary person he is. Do you know"—turning with a face of suppressed amusement to Lady Stanley—"he actually had the audacity to tell me that he considered Mr. Seymour's recovery was in nowise owing to my skill; and even hinted that if the case had been left entirely in my hands it would most probably have had an altogether different termination."

"What could he mean by making such an assertion?" asked Lady Stanley, looking puzzled.

Dr. Gibson shrugged his shoulders as he laughingly answered, "I assure you it was not easy to fathom his meaning, so mystical was his language. He talked a great deal about a certain powerful physician, to whom, he said, he and another of his master's friends (whose name, however, he would not mention) had applied when it was found that all *my* remedies were of no avail; and it was to this

physician he persisted in according the entire praise of Mr. Seymour's wonderful cure."

"Did he appear quite serious?"

"Perfectly! indeed, I suspect he was never more in earnest."

"Strange!" mused the lady—"very strange! What do you think, Edward?" she asked, turning towards her son.

On being thus appealed to, Sir Edward stood for the space of a few seconds speechless: the colour rushed over his face and brow, and he looked down upon the carpet with a vexed, irresolute air. Then mustering firmness, and conquering his reluctance, he lifted his eyes, and fixing them on the doctor's face said gravely,—

"Surely, Dr. Gibson does not need to be informed the name of this great and good physician; he must be well aware that often when man says, 'Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous,' another voice replies, 'I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thy wounds, saith the Lord.'"

"What a beautiful idea!" exclaimed Herbert, regarding his friend with a look of pleased approbation.

"Beautiful it may be," observed the doctor, in a half-jesting, half-serious tone. "Alas! that it should be so little comprehended; for, according to such doctrine, the world could well dispense with our poor services."

"Not so, doctor," returned Herbert, with that innate politeness which characterised him on all occasions. "God works by human means; and though we do and ought to give Him the chief place in our affections, and present to Him our first tribute of grateful praise, yet the instrument must not be forgotten or undervalued."

"But, Edward," said Lady Stanley, thoughtfully, "do you think we are justified in turning up these Old Testament promises, which evidently have no reference to us, and applying them to ourselves in this way?"

"We need not confine ourselves to the Old Testament, mother; there are hundreds of passages still more applicable in the New. Listen to this"—and he drew forth a small pocket Bible and read—

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And His fame went throughout all Syria. And they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; *and He healed them.*"

"Pardon me for my obtuseness," said Dr. Gibson, blandly; "but really I am quite at a loss to understand how *this* can possibly apply to the present case."

"Why, what can be plainer?" asked Sir Edward, in unfeigned surprise. "I must not, however, forget," he continued reflectively, "that had it not been for James Gordon, my own views would probably have been just as obscure."

"Ah, *he* is at the bottom of it," muttered the doctor below his breath, but not so softly as to prevent Lady Stanley from catching the words, in consequence of which she drew herself up with considerable *hauteur*, as if offended at his having for a moment presumed to imply that her son had allowed himself to be influenced by a servant—for such she considered James Gordon, although she had several times

remarked to Sir Edward that he appeared to be possessed of a degree of intelligence and refinement not commonly met with in that class of society.

Herbert, who was quick in reading countenances, rightly interpreted the thoughts which were passing through her mind at that moment; and looking at her with a pleasant smile, he said frankly,—

"You all seem to be labouring under some misapprehension with respect to my friend Gordon. *How* the mistake originated, I cannot tell; but he certainly is not, nor ever has been, my servant."

"*How* very singular!" observed Lady Stanley, instantly shaking off her slight feeling of annoyance. "I am surprised that he should have taken no pains to undeceive us."

"He would not dream of doing that," said Sir Edward; "for when I questioned him the first night we met, as to his apparently intimate knowledge of Herbert's affairs, he gave me plainly to understand that he was his servant."

"The kind, faithful creature!" cried Herbert, deeply affected at this new and unexpected proof of his affection: "I had no conception of his devotion extending so far as this; for he is naturally reserved, proud, and independent, almost to a fault."

"Perhaps so; but nevertheless he is, in my opinion, a noble fellow," was Sir Edward's warm, energetic response; and Herbert's face glowed with sincere and unadulterated pleasure at this hearty corroboration of his own sentiments.

He knew nothing as yet of the strong and peculiary interesting bond which existed between the two; neither did he for an instant imagine that they looked upon *his* restoration to comparative health solely and entirely as an answer to their united prayers on his beaalf, or he would have seen still greater cause for self-gratulation in having won for himself their warm friendship; not that shallow, superficial, worthless counterfeit, which sometimes (too often, alas!) assumes its name, and even appropriates its garb, and which the cold waters of adversity may quench, or a breath of calumny destroy; but that purer, firmer, stronger, and more abiding affection, which seeketh not her own, but others' good, and still holds on her gentle, loving way, unbiassed by human opinions, and unchanged by earthly circumstances; and when at length death's river darkly rolls between herself and the object of her love, still with faith's eagle eye she looks beyond this land of shadows, and triumphantly exclaims, "*We shall meet again!*"

"Shine as the sun shall we
In the bright kingdom then,
Our sky without a cloud or mist,
Ourselves without a stain."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SIR EDWARD'S STUMBLING-BLOCK.

"Usefulness is the very excellency of life. No man in the real Church of Christ liveth unto himself. Every true Christian is a tree of righteousness, whose fruits are good and profitable unto men. He is glad to help and comfort others." VENN.

"GORDON," said Herbert, the first time he had an opportunity of speaking to him alone, "I have not tried to express my grateful appreciation of the kindness and devotion you manifested towards me all through my long and tedious illness. You have indeed proved a true and faithful friend; and I only wish I had it in my power to be of some material service to yourself."

"Pray do not speak of that, sir," returned the other hastily.

"You know," continued Herbert, "it is quite impossible that I should allow you to go on as you are now doing; you have already sacrificed far too much for me, and I consider it absolutely necessary for you to begin to look after your own interests without loss of time."

"Sacrificed myself!" exclaimed James Gordon, while a look of real distress crossed his swarthy countenance; "O sir, you cannot think how it pains me to hear you apply such an expression *to me*."

"Well, we will not continue the subject, if it causes you any discomfort," said Herbert, with a smile. "I know that you are apt to accuse yourself of the meanest motives, even while performing the kindest actions; still you cannot expect *me* to place implicit reliance on your judgment in this respect."

"Ah, sir, you judge only by outward appearance; but *I* am sometimes allowed to get an insight into what is passing within the secret chambers of my own heart; *and that* makes the difference."

"You are right," replied Herbert, gravely; "I often think if others saw us as we see ourselves, the result would be indescribably strange and startling."

He paused for a moment, as if lost in thought; but presently rousing himself, went on in another tone,—

"Now, Gordon, I have heard of something which will, I hope, suit you."

James Gordon gave a little start, and pressed his lips firmly together, but he made no other answer, and Herbert continued,—

"Perhaps you may be aware that, besides this house which Sir Edward now occupies, he owns a beautiful estate of about two thousand acres in Cornwall."

"So I have heard," was the short answer.

"As he never resides there more than two or three months in the year, he is obliged to employ a trustworthy person, as a sort of steward."

"Well, sir," said the other, in a tone of profound indifference.

"Can you not guess what is coming, Gordon? Sir Edward is

very wishful that *you* should accept this situation, and intends speaking to you himself on the subject to-morrow. Meantime, he desires me to tell you that you will be quite exempt from any kind of positive work; and that the remuneration will be ample."

James Gordon seemed to be too intently occupied in minutely inspecting the shape and texture of the coat he was folding to reply; and Herbert, surprised at his protracted silence, came up to him, and laying his hand kindly upon his shoulder, said, while endeavouring to get a glimpse of his face,—

"Are you not pleased with this proposal, James? because if you would prefer something else, I have no doubt we can easily meet your wishes."

"It is not that!" he exclaimed, raising his head, and hastily brushing away a tear. "Sir Edward is very kind, but I——"

"What were you going to say, my friend?" asked Herbert, gently.

"Excuse me, sir; I was not prepared for this," he answered in a husky voice. "I had hoped that, for a time at least, I might have remained with you; and I could not help feeling somewhat disappointed on finding that you intended to get rid of me at once."

"Get rid of you!" repeated Herbert, in accents of astonishment, mingled with reproach; "surely you must know almost as well as myself how desolate I shall feel when you are gone, and how cheerfully I would ask you to stay if——"

"Then why need I go?" said his companion more briskly; "I have already told every one that I am your servant, and you know, sir, it would be quite impossible for you to do without one, whatever future arrangements you may make."

"My dear James," replied Herbert, smiling sadly, "you are mistaken; I shall most certainly be obliged to dispense with the kind of servant you allude to, and content myself—should I be so fortunate as to possess one at all—with the services of a very humble and commonplace individual."

"But if this is your only objection——" began James Gordon, eagerly.

"It is not," interposed Herbert, seriously. "I feel that for your own sake I ought to refuse to listen to your proposal. You are capable of better things, Gordon; and instead of attaching yourself to one who, though he may have the will, has no power to assist you, it would conduce far more to your benefit if you were to accept Sir Edward Stanley's excellent offer. Apart from this," he continued hurriedly, as he saw that James Gordon was about to speak, "I must tell you frankly that there is another and insuperable objection to your plan being carried out."

"And what may that be, sir?" asked the other, anxiously.

Herbert hesitated, and a deep crimson spot appeared on his pale cheeks. When he next spoke, it was in a low, gentle voice, and a manner of unusual agitation and embarrassment.

"My means being now very limited, James, I could not offer you that remuneration which you would be justly entitled to; *I cannot*, therefore, consent to enter into any arrangement whereby your prospects might be injured."

A keen look of vexation and disappointment came over James Gordon's face at this decisive reply; but after considering for a short time, something very closely resembling a smile stole to his lips, and twinkled beneath his bushy brows. No trace of it, how-

ever, was visible when, raising his eyes to Herbert's face, he observed, more calmly than the latter had expected,—

"Well, sir, I suppose you know best; and if you wish it, I will hear what Sir Edward has to say on the subject."

"That's right, my good friend," exclaimed Herbert, cheerfully, though he sighed likewise; for he was beginning to feel strongly attached to this strange, warm-hearted, and unselfish being; and notwithstanding his firm determination to resist every overture he might make towards permanently residing with him, he could not help wishing that it was in his power to retain the services of one who had shown so many and unequivocal signs of true and loving friendship in his hour of need.

On reaching the door, James Gordon turned suddenly round, and said in an abrupt tone, as if the thought had only at that moment occurred to him,—

"If anything *should* happen to prevent my being engaged by Sir Edward, might I be allowed to remain for a short time with you in Herbert Cottage—just a week or two, until I hear of some more suitable occupation?"

"What an unnecessary question, James!" said Herbert, gazing at him in evident surprise; "you might have known that so long as I have a roof to cover me, *you* will be most welcome to share it."

"Thank you, sir," was the grateful response.

"But I very much suspect," added Herbert, smiling kindly at him, "that the prospect my friend intends holding out to you will prove too tempting for you to decline. I was myself delighted when he proposed the thing to me—indeed, to let you into a little secret, I wanted to accept it for you at once, without even asking your opinion; but Sir Edward would not consent to such a proceeding, as he said your wishes might possibly tend in another direction."

"And he was right!" murmured James Gordon, directly he was out of Herbert's hearing; "I will go now, and see whether he is disengaged, as the sooner it is settled the better."

Accordingly he bent his steps to Sir Edward's dressing-room, and having knocked at the door, was at once admitted by the young baronet's own personal attendant, who, after waiting long enough to cast first a critical, and finally an approving survey of his master's faultless dinner attire, respectfully withdrew.

"Shall I disturb you?" asked Gordon, as Sir Edward kindly offered him a chair.

"Not at all," he answered, glancing at a spendid mediæval clock, which measured the hours on a marble pillar in one corner of the room; "for at least twenty minutes I shall be at your service."

"Thank you," returned the other, and there he stopped, apparently at a loss how to proceed.

"Can I do anything for you, Gordon?" inquired Sir Edward, in a tone of interest.

"Well, sir, the fact is I wanted to say a few words to you concerning the kind proposal you made to me through Mr. Herbert. You will not, I trust, think me ungrateful if——"

"Ah! that preliminary 'if' forewarns me what to expect," cried Sir Edward, looking disappointed; "you intend to negative my plan altogether, and thereby oblige me to look about for some mere mercenary being, who will expose me to constant trouble and annoyance."

"Oh, I hope you will succeed better than that, sir," said James

Gordon, earnestly. "Under almost *any* other circumstances, I would most gladly have availed myself of your kindness; for next to Mr. Herbert, there is no one I would more willingly serve; but I am sure you will not ask me to leave *him.*"

"Serve!" repeated Sir Edward, changing his position, and regarding him with a half-amused smile and an elevation of the eyebrows, in which there was some astonishment and no little perplexity; "why do you persist in speaking of yourself as Herbert's servant, James?"

"Is there any harm in it, sir?" he asked, naively.

"Harm?" echoed the young man, rather taken aback at the question: "perhaps not—but," he added, with an arch glance, "it seems so strange to hear *you* giving one version of the case, and my friend Herbert another and totally opposite one!"

"Yes, I dare say it does," returned James Gordon, thoughtfully; "it never struck me in that light before; but, of course, to all those who are unacquainted with——"

"Gordon!" interposed Sir Edward, with natural good breeding (observing that the idea distressed him), "pray pay no attention to my heedless words; for I should be sorry indeed to think that you allowed yourself to be influenced by them;—just go on in your own way, and I am sure it will turn out to be the right one."

"I hope so!" responded James Gordon, fervently; "but" (this he added softly and ponderingly to himself) "'it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.'"

"We have a sure Guide," suggested Sir Edward, encouragingly.

"Yes," was the cheerfully emphatic reply; "and one who has never yet denied His aid—and, better still, *never will.*"

"Your faith is remarkably strong, Gordon."

"It *ought* to be, after the remarkable answer we have received to our prayers, sir."

"True—very true!" returned Sir Edward, gravely. "At first, I thought that the remembrance of *that* would silence all *my* misgivings, and set me free from my former doubts and temptations; but I am still, alas!——"

"Ah, sir,—pardon me for saying so—you expect too much."

"How?" was the eager inquiry.

"You forget that this is the time for struggling and bearing the cross; *after* the conflict comes victory—not before; *after* toil, *rest.*"

"But is it not written, 'We which have believed *do* enter into rest'?"

"Yes, the rest of faith; that glorious *earnest* of the promised possession, which nevertheless falls far short of 'the glory that excelleth,'—the final and perfect rest remaining for us in heaven."

"Then you think that I want to obtain the prize almost before I have striven for it?"

"Exactly," answered the other candidly; "we are all so apt to look too much to the present, and too little to the future—too much on ourselves, and too little on Christ: consequently——"

"Go on, my friend."

"I am amazed at my presumption, sir; but I was going to add that, while bewailing our own weaknesses and shortcomings, and mourning over our many temptations, there is great danger of overlooking the *all-sufficiency of Christ:* and thus our very humility becomes a snare unto us."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION.

"There are some moments in our fate
That stamp the colour of our days."

As James Gordon uttered these words, Sir Edward rose and paced the apartment with quick uneven footsteps, and eyes thoughtfully bent upon the ground.

In a moment, the cause of his painful and often protracted seasons of darkness and despondency was clearly revealed to him; and although his partial heart sought to palliate its insidious tendency to self-engrossment, by reminding him that the very fact of his having allowed himself to cherish such a vivid perception of his own depravity and helplessness should afford him satisfaction, rather than regret, he was nevertheless constrained to admit that it had been the origin of much perplexity, hopelessness, and unbelief; perpetually depriving him of all sensible comfort or enjoyment in religion, and excluding him from many of those spiritual privileges which are found so precious and refreshing to the souls of those who aspire to be strong, active, and vigorous Christians.

Do not mistake me, dear reader.

It is well for us to think lowly of ourselves—well to feel that we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked; that our holiest actions are steeped in guilt, our purest thoughts defiled with sin, our best prayers need cleansing, and our very tears washing in the blood of Immanuel.

Oh, yes, it is well thus to lie at the Saviour's feet, thus to acknowledge our frailties and shortcomings, and confess ourselves the chief of sinners—*but* we must do more.

Instead of lingering on ourselves, until at length the world takes knowledge of us (*not* that we have been holding communion with Him who says, "Your joy no man taketh from you," but that religion renders us dull, mopish, and miserable), let us gaze more on the perfections of *His* glorious character, and less on the imperfections of our own; then shall we find, to our inexpressible comfort, that "Grace doth more exalt us, than our humility depresses us."

But I am wandering from my subject, and very needlessly, you say, since we are all too prone to err on the other side, and find that the difficulty generally is in striving to conquer our stubborn independent wills, and subdue the pride of our natural dispositions.

This, in the majority of cases, may perhaps be true; but I am convinced that there are instances not a few wherein timid and easily discouraged Christians are kept, like our friend Sir Edward, from making that advancement in the Divine life which they might and ought to make, through the constant habit (fostered no doubt by Satan himself) of turning their eyes within, where there is everything to disturb and harass, and *nothing* to encourage them.

To comfort *such*, M'Cheyne's words are peculiarly adapted:

"Do not take up your time so much with studying your own heart as with studying *Christ's heart.*"

"For one look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."

James Gordon began to fear, from the absolute silence which Sir Edward continued to maintain, that his plain speaking had in some way proved offensive to him. This idea troubled him not a little, and whenever the young man passed him in his walk up and down the room, he looked furtively at him from under his eyelids, hoping thereby to gain an insight into the nature of his lengthened meditations.

These were, however, soon brought to an abrupt termination by the loud ringing of the dinner bell.

"Ah, Gordon," said Sir Edward, starting slightly as he once more became conscious of his presence. "I am sorry to say, I had positively forgotten you. But," he added, in a low voice of emotion, "you will, I feel sure, forgive me when I tell you that I have been seriously reflecting upon what you last said, and your words have comforted me greatly."

"O sir," cried Gordon, his face flushing deep with pleasure, "I was afraid I might have unintentionally caused you annoyance."

Sir Edward smiled, and gently touched him on the arm, as he answered pleasantly, "I wish we could remain a little longer together, James, and finish our conversation."

"If you can spare me a few minutes to-morrow morning, sir, it will do just as well," returned the other, rising and opening the door. "I should like to have an opportunity of explaining my reasons for wishing to remain with Mr. Herbert."

"Very well," said Sir Edward. "I shall be here"—pointing to the room they were leaving—"directly after breakfast."

"In the meanwhile, might I ask you *not* to mention to Mr. Herbert my anxiety to continue in his service?" said Gordon, dropping his voice to an earnest whisper.

Sir Edward turned round, and surveyed him with another of his strangely mingled glances of doubt and amusement, while answering good humouredly, "All right—I will be on my guard."

And he kept his word; for though Herbert eagerly informed him of the result of his own interview with this anomalous individual, and expressed his conviction that ultimately he would thankfully respond to Sir Edward's kind proposition, the latter immediately changed the subject without in any way alluding to what had so recently passed between James Gordon and himself.

That night Herbert felt stronger than he had yet done since his illness, in consequence of which he sat up much later than usual.

As the time approached for them to separate, the young baronet showed evident signs of restlessness and uneasiness. Several times he seemed on the point of speaking, and as often repressing the words which were trembling on his lip, he would turn hastily away, and walking to one of the windows, fling aside the curtain, and stand for some minutes silently gazing out upon the star-lit sky. Lady Stanley's surprise, as her eyes followed these erratic movements, was not unmingled with alarm, and more than once she stopped short in the middle of a sentence, unable to conceal her solicitude.

At last Sir Edward came behind her, and, leaning over the back of her chair, so that she could not see his face, he said in a tone where gentleness mingled with firmness, "Mother, it has often occurred to

me lately that we ought to assemble regularly as a household, for morning and evening prayers."

The lady looked round with a startled and even troubled expression; and her manner was agitated as she echoed involuntarily, "*Prayers!*"

"Yes," answered the young man, gravely; "have we not neglected this duty too long, my dearest mother?"

"Of course you are at liberty to act as you think proper in your own house," returned Lady Stanley, after a short pause; and her voice, though perfectly polite, and free from the least shadow of annoyance, lacked that warmth and cordial sympathy which she would have manifested on any other subject.

Sir Edward felt this omission keenly; and the tears stood thick in his eyes as he asked mournfully, "O mother! is it *thus* you would bring back the remembrance of him we have lost?"

"No, Edward," she answered, her own lip quivering; "I merely wished to remind you of your own personal responsibility."

"But have *you* no objection to my plan being carried out?" inquired her son, colouring, and endeavouring to smile.

"Not if you are really bent on it," replied Lady Stanley, laying her hand on his arm, and drawing him closer to her. "Have you given the matter due consideration?"

Firmly and conclusively the young man answered, "I have."

"And decided?"

"Yes: it is, in my opinion, not only a positive duty to be performed, but——"

"Very well," exclaimed the lady, cutting short his argument. "I will give the necessary orders. When would you wish to begin?"

"There is no time like the present," said Sir Edward, taking up a large Bible, and putting it before his friend. "Herbert, *you* will be our chaplain to-night, will you not?"

"But, Edward," interposed his mother, staring blankly at him, "why this precipitance? Mr. Seymour's health may suffer from it."

"There can be no danger of that," exclaimed the latter, speaking for the first time. "I thank God," he added fervently, while clasping his friend's hand in his own, "for thus putting it into your heart to honour Him before your household, and shall with the greatest pleasure assist you, if Lady Stanley gives me permission."

"You must do *all* or nothing," said Sir Edward, in low, hurried tones; and Herbert as he gazed into his countenance, surcharged with deep anxiety and responsibility, felt that it would be cruel to refuse the request. He could understand something of the struggle he had gone through before bringing himself to take such a decisive step, as well as the wave upon wave of agitating and contending feelings which he had doubtless encountered, ere he could muster firmness and resolution—qualities quite foreign to his nature—to announce his intention to Lady Stanley, and, in spite of her evident lack of sympathy or encouragement, adopt measures for carrying it into prompt execution.

"Well, Edward, you shall be obeyed," replied Herbert, as these thoughts passed rapidly through his mind; "I know it always seems a formidable undertaking at first, but once commenced, the rest is easy."

Sir Edward cast on him a look of mingled gratitude and affection, and then turning to his mother, said appealingly,—

"Now we have only to summon the servants. May I ring the bell?"

"Certainly," she answered, smiling faintly, and having thus, however reluctantly, yielded her assent, she rose to the occasion, and issued her orders to the old butler, who presently appeared at the door, with all her usual grace and calm dignity of manner.

During the slight bustle which was unavoidably caused by the servants taking their respective places, Herbert and Sir Edward exchanged a few whispered words; but when this had subsided, and unbroken silence reigned in the room, the latter seated himself by the side of his mother, and Herbert proceeded to conduct the simple yet important service, by reading the first sixteen verses of Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

He added no comment of his own, neither was any needful. Every word fell clear and fresh upon the ears of those present when uttered by his rich melodious voice; and there was not one amongst them—from the dignified and intelligent Lady Stanley to the simplest and most illiterate of her servants—whose attention he did not instantaneously arrest and fix, causing them, whatever their previous sentiments may have been, to shake off all levity or thoughtless indifference, and listen seriously and reverently to the beautiful lessons of heavenly truth which each succeeding sentence was so peculiarly designed to teach.

Afterwards followed a prayer, brief yet comprehensive, in which could be discerned the devout breathings of a chastened soul; a spirit of filial love, influenced by heaven-born principles, filled with holy aspirations, and guided by infinite wisdom, approaching with confidence the footstool of his Father's throne, and earnestly supplicating the Divine blessing to rest upon every member of that household.

Never before had such a scene been enacted in Lady Stanley's drawing-room; and as with quiet footsteps the well-trained servants withdrew, and Herbert also, after pausing for a moment's reflection, rose to retire for the night, she came forward, and said in a voice tremulous from lately awakened emotion, "Are you very tired?"

"Tired! oh, no," responded the young man, taking her proffered hand, and regarding her with a look of anxious interest.

"We are greatly indebted to you," she murmured, averting her face, lest he should perceive her agitation.

"On the contrary, it is I who should, and do, thank you most sincerely for the happiness you have conferred upon me," replied Herbert, turning gravely away.

And for full ten minutes after he had gone Lady Stanley remained in the same spot, pondering deeply upon these few apparently unimportant words, and asking herself whether she ought to feel vexed or gratified at the extraordinary influence Herbert had so unaccountably acquired over her son.

"And yet it is *not* unaccountable," she mused with a self-accusing sigh; "there is something very pleasing and superior about him—a strange fascination which draws one almost insensibly towards him, and inspires one with no common degree of confidence and respect. I wonder what it can be?"

Before she had settled this question Sir Edward returned to her, after having accompanied Herbert to his room; and as she marked the added brightness of his countenance, her own brow cleared very considerably, and she inwardly decided that on the whole his friendship with Herbert was a thing to be proud of, rather than the reverse.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THOUGHTS OF KINDNESS.

"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do;
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not." SHAKESPEARE.

PUNCTUAL to his appointment, Sir Edward repaired to his dressing-room soon after breakfast the following morning, where he had a long and confidential interview with James Gordon, in the course of which he learnt many interesting particulars concerning his friend, and was also made acquainted with some of Gordon's own plans for the future.

Had it not been for the warmth and cordiality of Sir Edward's manner towards himself, and his intense affection—bordering almost on enthusiasm—for Herbert, James Gordon's lips would have been sealed on these delicate topics. But even he was not proof against the mighty power of sympathy, and feeling that something was due to the young baronet for the kind interest he evinced in his welfare, as well as the care and attention he had so freely lavished upon his sick friend, he poured into his willing ear the story of his own past griefs.

He spoke of his early days, his wild, ungovernable, reckless disposition; his impatient irritation under any, even the gentlest kind of restraint; and his thorough contempt for everything that savoured of religion and godliness.

Then he passed on to speak with shame and sorrow of his more open violations of God's laws—his scornful rejection of his mother's reiterated warnings and reproofs—his sinful wanderings from the path of rectitude and peace—his misery and hopelessness—his poverty and degradation and despair; how he loathed himself for the evil he committed, and yet repented not of his transgressions, how he longed, yet dreaded, to return to his much-injured parent—hoped, yet feared, to behold her face once more before he died!

Of that blessed home-coming his feelings would permit him to say but little, though he dwelt at some length upon the kindness he had received from Herbert, whose indefatigable exertions on his behalf, and the many difficulties he encountered in carrying out his benevolent designs, he eloquently described.

"Well, I cannot blame you for objecting so strongly to leave him," said Sir Edward, when he had concluded his warm panegyric. "I am only afraid that you will meet with more opposition from Herbert than you imagine, as he feels a certain degree of hesitation in consenting to an arrangement by which *you* would derive so little pecuniary advantage."

"*That* need not trouble him," returned James Gordon, with singular earnestness, "for——"

He paused and cast his eyes on the ground, a shade of embarrassment meanwhile passing over his brow.

"Yes, I know how entirely disinterested you are," continued Sir Edward, significantly.

"Not at all, sir," interrupted his companion, eagerly. "Something very closely allied to selfishness influences me in this matter, I suspect!"

"Oh, indeed," rejoined Sir Edward, laughing incredulously. "Well, whatever may be your motive," he went on more seriously, "you have my best wishes for your success. If *I* could in any way forward your views, I would gladly exert myself; but unless I am mistaken, you will prefer managing this matter in your own way."

"Thank you, sir," was the grateful respose. "I do not despair of accomplishing my object."

Having said this, James Gordon left the room; but, before he had proceeded far, he was followed, by Sir Edward, who, coming close up to him, touched him on the arm, and, lowering his voice so that no third person could overhear his words, said abruptly,—

"Gordon, it has just occurred to me that Herbert will probably spend half his income in charity."

"Very likely, sir," replied the other, with perfect composure.

"And I want you to remember that my purse is always at your service—you might, I should think, discover many ways of making his position more endurable, and adding greatly to his comfort, without *his* being aware of the fact—do you understand me, Gordon?"

"Perfectly!" he answered—a quick responsive gleam passing over his face.

"See that you make use of me, then," replied Sir Edward, emphatically, as he hastily moved away.

The next moment he returned, saying in a tone of affected carelessness,—

"By-the-by, James, I intended to ask you to lend me the key of Herbert Cottage—I have a curiosity to go over it."

"Sir!" exclaimed his companion, in unfeigned surprise.

"There can be no objection, I suppose," said the young man, a little impatiently.

"None whatever," replied James Gordon, recovering from his surprise; "but would you not prefer waiting a few days, and then going over it with Mr. Herbert?"

"No, no," was the decisive answer; "I wish particularly to see it at once."

"Very well, sir; here is the key."

"Don't breathe a syllable of [this to Herbert," whispered Sir Edward, as he eagerly grasped it.

And, without stopping for a reply, he was gone.

He did not see the smile of amusement—none the lese real because partially suppressed—that his concluding injunction had called up on James Gordon's face; neither did he hear the low-toned ejaculatory sentence which involuntarily escaped his lips, or he would have felt no little astonishment at these symptoms of apparently causeless mirth in the demeanour of one usually so serious and staid in all his movements.

A few hasty strides brought him to the door of Lady Stanley's tastefully embellished boudoir, where he knew she generally spent an hour or two every morning.

She was reading when he entered, but instantly laid aside her book, and smilingly pointed to a seat near her own.

Instead, however, of taking it at once, Sir Edward perambulated the apartment for a short time, pondering deeply.

At length his brow cleared, and a look of evident satisfaction lighted up his pleasant countenance.

"Mother," he said, pausing directly in front of her, and addressing her with sparkling eyes, "I have such a delightful scheme in my head, and I want your help!"

"Well," she observed in a tone of good-humoured raillery, "what is it? Are you going to rebuild your model almshouses which were blown down last winter? or do you wish me to assist you in choosing another site for—— "

"No, mother, no!" interrupted the young man, colouring lightly at being thus reminded of his past failures; "I simply want to spend these," and he showed her a bundle of bank notes which he held in his hand," in purchasing furniture for Herbert Cottage."

"Oh!" exclaimed the lady, leaning back in her chair, and regarding him attentively, "I understood that it was already furnished."

"From what I have incidentally gathered in my conversations with Herbert, everything must be in a most woful state of dilapidation; for although James Gordon has been getting the house itself put in thorough repair, he had no instructions about the furniture, and it is now many years since it was renewed."

"Still I do not see how you can remedy this," returned Lady Stanley, in a tone of gentle remonstrance. "Your friend would very naturally feel aggrieved and insulted at your interference in such a purely personal matter."

"I do not think there is the slightest chance of his discovering what has been done," said Sir Edward, thoughtfully. "He has never yet seen the cottage, and it would not occur to him to suspect me of having made any change in it."

"Perhaps not," replied the lady, shaking her head, as much as to say that her next words would prove unanswerable; "but why should you take it for granted that he has not acuteness enough to find out the difference between old and new furniture?"

"The very question which puzzled me a good deal at first!" exclaimed her son eagerly. "I have, however, thought of a way of managing so as to obviate this difficulty."

"Really!" (spoken in a rather surprised tone).

"Yes; I suddenly remembered those ancient-looking suites of furniture we saw at Fisher's when purchasing the ebony cabinet you prize so much; and although they are certainly very peculiar, there is something handsome about them, in spite of their old-fashioned appearance."

"O Edward!" said Lady Stanley, unable to repress a smile at his ignorance; "these 'old-fashioned' articles, as you are pleased to call them, are more costly that you suspect."

"Indeed! We must hope then that Herbert will in like manner undervalue them," he cheerfully rejoined.

"The expense does not alarm you?" observed Lady Stanley, slowly.

"Far from it, mother. I have only provided myself with £200, but if more be necessary it shall be forthcoming."

"You heedless, extravagant creature!" cried the lady, half jestingly, half earnestly, "when will you learn prudence?"

"I am taking my first lesson," he answered in the same tone, "so that ere long you may expect to find me quite proficient in this practical branch of wisdom. Meanwhile would it be possible for you to give me the benefit of your experience?"

"Well, as you seem so thoroughly in earnest, I suppose I must rouse myself to the undertaking; but tell me first of all" (looking dubiously at the bank notes) "what you expect me to do."

"I thought that perhaps it would be advisable for us to go over the cottage in order to discover what is really required, and we might call at Fisher's on our return, and tell him to send the furniture there without delay. I am sorry to appear impatient," added the young man considerately, "but unless something is done at once it will be too late; as it would be impossible for us to induce Herbert to remain here more than a few days longer."

"Very well," said Lady Stanley, promptly; "I can be ready in less than half an hour."

"Oh, thank you," replied the young man, with a bright glance of affection, such as amply repaid the fond mother for the trifling inconvenience he was about to cause her; "the carriage shall be here immediately;" and as suddenly as he had entered, he turned to leave the room.

"Of course Gordon will accompany us?" observed the lady, arresting him ere he was gone.

"I did not think of asking him," said Sir Edward, returning to her side; "but if you consider it necessary I can do so. Perhaps it would be as well," he continued, musingly "to take him into our confidence now, instead of waiting."

"Oh, decidedly; he may be of much assistance to us: indeed, I do not see how you *could* keep him in ignorance, even if you desired it."

Accordingly Sir Edward went in search of him, but the unexpected arrival of friends from a distant part of the country obliged him to defer his communication until some more appropriate season, and he had to content himself with expressing in a few hurried words his wish that James Gordon should hold himself in readiness to accompany Lady Stanley and himself to Herbert Cottage, so that there might be no unnecessary delay after the departure of their guests.

To this arrangement James Gordon readily agreed, although, if the expression of his face could be relied on, he certainly appeared to attach far less importance to the anticipated visit than did the young baronet.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN ARRIVAL.

"No mortal doth know
What he can bestow,
What light, strength, and comfort do after him go."
GAMBOLD.

AFTER a long and not particularly interesting drive through the crowded streets of Lanchester, Sir Edward and Lady Stanley had at length the satisfaction of arriving at Herbert Cottage.

It was a small but commodious and comfortable dwelling, situated on a gentle eminence, with a tastefully arranged flower-garden in front, and a closely shaven lawn behind, gradually sloping down towards the river—a portion of which ran through the grounds, greatly adding to their beauty, although, alas! a nearer survey showed that it no longer retained its pristine clearness and purity.

"What a pretty place!" was Sir Edward's first exclamation, as they alighted from the carriage, and walked up the neatly-kept footpath leading to the house.

"*Originally* it must have been very pretty," replied his mother, casting a critical glance around her; "but now——" and she pointed significantly to two tall chimneys within a short distance of each other, from whence issued volumes of smoke.

"Ah, you have discovered the dark side of the picture," said Sir Edward, laughingly: "*I* was intending to ignore that altogether."

"It would be difficult to close one's eyes to such a palpable objection," reurned the lady, following James Gordon into the house.

Here a surprise awaited them; for not only was there no appearance of discomfort or dilapidation, but every part of it, from the drawing-room to the cozy little kitchen, was filled with good substantial furniture, something similar in design to that which Sir Edward had spoken of purchasing. Indeed, so striking was this similarity, that he paused at the entrance of one of the rooms, and gazed about him in mute amazement, utterly confounded and perplexed at the extraordinary coincidence.

"We are too late, Edward," said his mother, coming close up to him, and speaking in a low tone; "your idea has been already carried into execution by another;" and she fixed her eyes searchingly upon James Gordon's immovable countenance, as if asking for an explanation.

"Your ladyship sees that the furniture is quite good, although by no means modern in style," he remarked, with an air of well-feigned unconsciousness.

"So I perceive," gravely responded the lady.

"Why, James, we were not prepared for this!" exclaimed Sir Edward, abruptly; "what have you been doing?"

"Well, sir," replied the other, shunning his archly-inquiring looks,

"there were a great many repairs to be attended to when I first arrived here——"

"Nonsense," interrupted Sir Edward, impatiently; "you know I did not allude to the repairs; it is the furniture that surprises me; how is it that Herbert still speaks of it as old and worn out, without mentioning the fact of your having received his instructions to renew it?"

"*Does* he consider it worn out?" asked James Gordon, uneasily; "I was not aware of that. I thought"—here he hesitated, and seemed much embarrassed—"I expected he would never discover the alteration which had been made in it."

Lady Stanley exchanged a brief but expressive glance with her son, as she asked gently,—

"Are we to understand, then, that you have, on your own responsibility, refurnished the house?"

James Gordon bowed assent.

"But how, I do not comprehend," she began, in evident bewilderment; "I mean," she went on hastily, "that perhaps Mr. Seymour may object to the expense."

Again that same curious smile which had so often before puzzled Sir Edward, appeared on James Gordon's lips; and for the space of half a minute he drew himself up with a gesture of proud indifference; but quickly recovering his self-possession, he answered in a tone of the utmost respect,—

"I hope it may not be necessary for me to enter into any of these particulars with him."

"How can you avoid doing so?" inquired Lady Stanley, in accents of profound astonishment; for she was still thinking of the expense, which her experience told her would not be trifling, and wondering what he could possibly mean by proposing to keep Herbert in ignorance of the amount.

She would have said more, but Sir Edward, whose keen observant eye had been steadily and scrutinisingly fixed upon James Gordon's face all this time, saw that he was becoming painfully embarrassed, and with his usual kind-hearted consideration, and with an irresistible smile of good humour, he instantly interposed, saying pleasantly,—

"Now, mother, that is scarcely a fair question; do you not see that he fears to let us into his secrets, lest we should unwittingly reveal them to Herbert. I have no doubt"—turning slyly to Gordon—"that it was this very fear which made you so anxious to prevent our coming here to-day."

"Well, indeed, sir, you are right," replied the other frankly. "I should have preferred keeping my own counsel; but now that you have found out what I wished so much to conceal, I must throw myself on your mercy, and beg you to assist me in hiding the truth from Mr. Herbert."

"Oh, certainly; *we* will not divulge anything," laughed Sir Edward.

Lady Stanley yet looked a little puzzled; but Gordon contrived to change the current of her thoughts, by calling her attention to various alterations he proposed making, and respectfully asking her advice on several points connected with the arrangement of the furniture, until at length she became really interested in his plans, and even condescended to suggest a few improvements, unimportant in

themselves, but which, when carried into effect, would entirely change the aspect of things, and remove that peculiar air of stiffness so usually pervading those apartments which are unadorned by the great, though nameless, and often unacknowledged charm—the presence and undescribable influence of a woman of taste, intelligence, and refinement.

Herbert, meanwhile, unconscious of the cause of their absence, spent some time in the library, writing letters.

When he grew tired of this occupation, he sauntered into the drawing-room, and, taking up a book which Sir Edward had that morning received from London, ensconced himself in a large easy-chair near one of the windows, and after giving utterance to a weary sigh, and passing his hand hastily across his forehead, opened it at the first page, and began to study its contents. For about half an hour he remained thus; but by-and-by the old feeling of weariness seemed to return, for he replaced the book on the table, and with another low-breathed sigh glanced restlessly around him, as if in search of some other employment.

Suddenly his eye lighted upon the organ, standing in an adjoining room, and rapidly passing through the partially opened door, he seated himself at the instrument; and, forgetful of his languor and weariness, proceeded with no mean skill and power to strike the chords.

Presently its rich deep tones swept in thrilling strains through the house, making the very servants pause in the midst of their work, and hold their breath, lest they should lose one note of that grand symphony!

Nor were they the only listeners. Two ladies, young and handsome, accompanied by an elderly gentleman, whose striking resemblance to Lady Stanley was sufficiently indicative of the near relationship which existed between them, stood for a moment quite still, and beckoning to the old butler, who with a look of pleased surprise upon his face was hastening to conduct them upstairs, said, hurriedly,—

"Martin, who is in the music-room? That is certainly not Edward's playing."

"I think it must be Mr. Seymour," he answered; "for Sir Edward and my lady are both out."

"What a magnificent performer!" whispered the gentleman to one of his companions.

"Beautiful!" was the low-toned reply.

"I scarcely like interrupting him," he continued presently.

"Oh, if you are afraid of breaking the spell, you can step softly into the drawing-room by this door," returned the lady; "and then you need not make known your presence until he has finished. Ella and I will join you as soon as we have dressed for dinner."

Long before this was accomplished, however, the sudden cessation of the music showed them that Herbert had in some way become aware that he was not alone; and when at length they repaired to the drawing-room, they found the two gentlemen engaged in an earnest and animated conversation.

Herbert looked carelessly round as the door opened; but his calmly indifferent manner instantly gave place to an appearance of lively interest, on perceiving who had entered.

"Sir Edward's sisters, I presume?" he said, turning to his companion. "Might I ask you to introduce——"

"Indeed, no introduction is necessary," exclaimed one of the ladies, coming forward, and frankly extending her hand; "we are both prepared to look upon Mr. Seymour as an old friend,—are we not, Ella?"

"Yes," replied the latter, following her sister's example; "Edward has so often spoken of you."

"Ah!" returned Herbert, smiling slightly as he bent his clear, dark eye upon her blooming Hebe face, "I should have preferred making your acquaintance under different circumstances."

"Would you?" asked the first speaker, with straightforward simplicity—"why?"

"Because, if I read your brother's character aright, he is greatly given to a particular kind of hero-worship; or, more properly speaking, he invests those he loves, although they may be the most commonplace individuals, with every excellence he can conceive of, and then expects others to see them in the same partial light."

"A very harmless tendency," responded the lady, with a bright smile.

"Nevertheless it has its disadvantages," pursued Herbert, more seriously; "for when those whose expectations have been raised by listening to the glowing description of these exalted merits, have an opportunity of judging for themselves, how often it happens that the pleasing illusion vanishes in a moment, and the imaginary hero finds himself, without any fault of his own, from henceforth slighted and despised."

The young lady laughed merrily, and glancing archly at her sister, who seemed to be of a quiet and somewhat retiring disposition, answered playfully,—

"I trust that in the present instance no such *contretemps* will occur."

"A truly fallacious hope," rejoined Herbert, in the same tone, "and one which will, I fear, end in much disappointment. However," he added, smilingly, "by giving you fair warning what to expect, I have done all that can be considered necessary."

"You have indeed: and now, to change the subject, perhaps you will tell us how it is that we return home after a three months' absence, and find you all alone, mamma and Edward both out, and no signs of dinner, though it is considerably past the usual hour."

"I believe Lady Stanley did not think you could be here until to-morrow," said Herbert, glancing at his watch; "but——"

Even as he spoke, the sudden loud ringing of the bell, followed by footsteps hastily ascending the stairs, announced their arrival; and almost before Lucy and Ella Stanley could spring from their seats and cross the room, the door was thrown open, and Sir Edward and his mother entered together.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TWO SISTERS.

" Christians are like the several flowers in a garden, that have each of them the dew of heaven, which, being shaken with the wind, they let fall at each other's roots, whereby they are jointly nourished, and become nourishers of each other." BUNYAN.

IT would be impossible to find two sisters who presented a greater contrast to each other, both in personal appearance and disposition, than did Lucy and Ella Stanley.

Lucy's style of beauty consisted of large, dark, sparkling eyes; an abundance of glossy and richly waved raven-black hair, simply bound round her small, well-shaped head; perfect regularity of feature, and graceful symmetry of form; while her never-failing liveliness and vivacity, the charming freshness and frank sincerity of her captivating manners, her unaffected ease, and entire freedom from anything like shyness or stiffness, combined with her many other attractions, rendered her a universal favourite in society, and made her deservedly admired by all those who had the pleasure of being acquainted with her.

Her younger sister, on the contrary, was considerably below the usual height, with a fair, girlish face, lovely as a dream, but quiet and reposeful, almost to a fault, in its expression; bright golden hair, turned back from her forehead, and falling behind in a cluster of natural curls; and soft, violet eyes, which were too often hidden by their long silky lashes.

Her manner was marked by a gentle kind of dignity, amounting, when in the presence of strangers, to reserve, and procuring for her the character of proud and unapproachable, from those who were unacquainted with the depth and fervour of her really affectionate disposition; although those who knew her best saw in her formal and apparently haughty demeanour, symptoms of excessive shyness rather than pride.

Herbert felt, rather than perceived, that, notwithstanding this peculiarity, *Ella* was Sir Edward's favourite sister, and various little incidents soon occurred to show the correctness of his judgment.

She had in fact been his (Sir Edward's) chosen companion and *confidante* ever since she could remember; had shared his sports when they were children together in the nursery, soothed his boyish griefs in her own loving, sisterly fashion, and (although two years younger than himself) was made the repository of his fancied wrongs, when, as often happened, he found himself in disgrace with his tutors, in consequence of his careless disregard of their wishes, and the negligent performance of his appointed tasks.

Lucy was too full of merriment and light-hearted gaiety to suit him at these times; too lively and volatile, too apt to laugh at his difficulties and turn his anxiety about them into ridicule; and therefore he felt it a relief to escape from her playful sallies, and seek the society of her gentle and more sedate sister, who listened to all his

complaints without betraying the least sign of impatience, and by a few judicious words often contrived to set things right again. She seemed intuitively to enter into his feelings; and if she could not help, he was at least sure of her cordial sympathy.

Thus it was that after Sir Edward's return from B——, where he had been taught so painful a lesson, he did not content himself with giving her a circumstantial account of all that had transpired on that memorable Sabbath afternoon, but went on to confide to her the history of his subsequent deep conviction of sin, his ever-recurring doubts, anxieties, and fears, together with his ardent longings, aspirations, and desires for another and a happier existence. In this case it was scarcely to be expected that Ella—herself unenlightened on these momentous subjects—should be of much assistance to him in his eager search after the truth, neither could she rightly comprehend the cause of his frequent seasons of darkness and despondency; still, she respected his motives, and did not attempt (as some would have done) to rouse him out of his depression, by pronouncing his new ideas ridiculous or visionary, and repay his confidence by treating him, after this frank avowal of his sentiments with quiet scorn, or contemptuous pity.

She did not even express surprise at his enthusiastic encomiums on the friend who had rescued him from a watery grave, and also, both by persuasion and example endeavoured—though fruitlessly as it seemed—to guide his erring footsteps into the only safe path; but her earnest and thoughtful attention showed that she was intensely interested; and unconsciously she began to look forward with mingled curiosity and awe, to meeting the paragon, whose perfections she heard so often and eloquently described.

The first glance Ella obtained of her brother's face, as he entered the drawing-room with Lady Stanley that evening, convinced her that some great though inexplicable change had taken place in him during her absence.

The old expression of perplexity and unrest which was for ever wandering over his ingenuous countenance, had disappeared; and peace and serenity shone in every feature.

As soon as he found an opportunity of speaking to her alone, he told her of the new hope which stirred his breast, and the deep abiding gladness of his unfettered soul; and she now rejoiced in his joy, even as she had formerly mourned in his sorrow.

The following morning, Colonel Lansmore (Lady Stanley's brother) was obliged to leave them, as he had arranged to join his wife at Malvern, where she was spending a few months for the benefit of her health; and shortly after his departure, Herbert also called his young host aside, and announced his intention of retiring at once to his own cottage.

But this communication met with such strenuous opposition, both from Sir Edward and his mother, that he was induced at length to yield a reluctant promise to remain with them until the end of the week—not all their expostulations could prevail on him to fix a later date.

"I am afraid it was our inopportune arrival that made you so anxious to be gone," observed Lucy Stanley, in her playful tones. "You see, mamma," she added, turning to Lady Stanley, and trying to look serious—though there was a half-mocking smile upon her

lips—"Mr. Seymour, having no sisters of his own to tease and trouble him, is inclined, I suspect, to look upon them, where they exist, as necessary evils!"

"You do me injustice," replied Herbert, surprised at this unexpected indictment; "those who have the good fortune to possess them, cannot, I think, be too thankful; for a sister's love has often accomplished what no other earthly power could effect; and the influence of many a sister's life will, I am convinced, extend, not only through time, but eternity."

"Edward, do you hear that?" exclaimed the young lady, in an ecstacy of delight. "Pray be grateful for your privileges!"

"I trust I am," said Sir Edward, smiling down upon his younger sister, who was attentively listening to the conversation, although she had not herself spoken—"don't you think so, Ella?"

"Yes," she answered, returning his smile, "I am sure you are, but——"

She stopped, and bent her head to conceal her embarrassment.

"But what, Ella?" cried her sister, encouragingly; "we are waiting for the conclusion of your sentence. Perhaps" (in an audible aside to Sir Edward) she is about to convict you of some omission in this respect."

"I was merely going to ask Mr. Seymour, whether he does not overrate our capabilities," returned Ella, timidly lifting her eyes to his face.

"Would it be possible to do that?" he inquired gently; "are we not all influencing each other in one way or other?"

"I suppose so," was the thoughtful reply.

"Especially by example," observed Sir Edward, musingly; "it is always so much easier to *point* in the right direction than to *walk* in it."

"You are beginning to take a very practical view of the case, Edward," said Lucy, turning her laughing eye upon him; now, for my own part, I prefer a more general application."

"I can quite understand that," remarked the young baronet, vainly trying to conquer a certain tremulousness of voice; "for I have had the same feeling a thousand times."

"And what has changed you?" she asked, with an expression of extreme perplexity, as for the first time it occurred to her that he *was* changed.

Lady Stanley gave an involuntary nervous start, and glanced anxiously at her son, fearing he might be annoyed at this apparently *mal-apropos* question.

Ella also directed one earnest, wistful look towards him, and then waited for his reply with evident uneasiness.

But their fears were groundless. Happily for himself, Sir Edward had effectually shaken off the weakness and false humility which had so long clung to him, making him shrink from confessing Christ before men, lest he should in some unguarded moment disgrace his profession and dishonour his Lord, and a smile of indescribable brightness illumined his countenance as he answered in a low but firm voice,—

"The discovery of my *personal* accountability in God's sight first led me to see the inefficiency of a mere form of godliness, and the supreme importance of securing a personal Saviour, if I would aspire to the name of Christian."

A disdainful smile curled Lucy Stanley's lip, as she heard this,

and she murmured half aloud, "What strange infatuation! I could never have believed it."

"*Now*," continued Sir Edward, without appearing to notice these signs of disapprobation, "I can thankfully say I am no longer my own, but Christ's; and therefore from henceforth it will be my humble endeavour to serve Him."

He added no more; but rising hastily from his seat, left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE POWER OF MUSIC.

"When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet—
* * * *
Such music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made."

ELLA'S eyes followed her brother with an expression of the truest interest, as he made his sudden exit, and she seemed on the point of going after him, when Lady Stanley, divining her purpose, and rightly supposing that Sir Edward would feel even *her* presence a restraint in his present frame of mind, suggested that they should fill up the time until luncheon with music.

"O mamma," exclaimed Lucy, recovering her wonted vivacity, "Mr Seymour is such a brilliant performer himself, that *our* poor attempts will not be likely to yield him the smallest gratification."

Herbert started out of a reverie on hearing his name thus pronounced, and coming quickly forward, hastened to open the pianoforte, saying as he did so,—

"I should be sorry to accuse you of insincerity; but if you will persist in giving me credit for talents which I do not really possess, I see no other alternative."

"Now that is a most uncharitable speech," gaily returned the young lady, "and I propose that we punish you, by insisting on the instant repetition of the glorious symphony with which you unconsciously greeted our arrival last evening!"

"You shall be obeyed," replied Herbert, smiling quietly, "but only on condition that I am first permitted to listen to your own performance."

"Do you call this obedience?" asked Lucy, playfully shaking her head; "if you submit at all, it should be unconditionally. However, we must humour you, I suppose, as mamma tells us you are still an invalid—what shall it be?"

"You can have no difficulty in making a selection," remarked Herbert, laying his hand upon a pile of new music.

"Perhaps not," she answered, running her fingers lightly over the keys, "but you must bear in mind that what pleases me would not necessarily suit you; *my* taste is gay, whereas yours——" A slight shrug completed the sentence.

"You think me too grave to take pleasure in anything that does not savour of dulness or gloom?" rejoined Herbert, in mingled surprise and amusement.

"Scarcely that," said the animated girl, glancing archly up into his face; "still, from all I have heard of you, and the little I have seen, I confess I am disposed to regard you with a degree of awe and veneration quite foreign to my nature."

"My dear Lucy," interposed her mother, "Mr. Seymour will form

a very extraordinary opinion of you, if you entertain him with these strange sentiments. But, indeed," turning with a smile to Herbert, "you must not suppose she is in earnest in half she says."

"Oh, if my veracity is going to be called in question," cried Lucy, assuming an injured air, "I had better change the subject without wasting more time. Come, Ella, and join me in this duet," she added, as she opened a difficult piece, and placed it on the music-stand.

Her sister hesitated for a moment before complying with this request. Then she approached them with evident reluctance, as if she would gladly evade the task assigned to her if possible, not from nervousness or affectation, but because her thoughts were still with her brother, and she was only waiting for Lucy to commence playing, before making her escape from the room.

"Do not trouble yourself about Edward, my love," said Lady Stanley, observing the expression of her face, as she took her seat at the instrument; "he will soon return to us again."

"Of course he will," assented Lucy, in a half-mocking tone, and with a merry glance of her eye, which might have disconcerted Ella, had her own not been at that moment fixed upon the page before her; "he is as fond of music as we are, and I have a very strong suspicion that he will reappear almost immediately."

But notwithstanding this strong suspicion, Sir Edward seemed in no hurry to return.

One beautiful piece followed another in rapid succession; and Herbert, who, whatever his own impression on the subject might be, possessed an exquisite ear for music, listened to their performance with intense pleasure.

"You sing, do you not?" he said at length, addressing for the first time Ella, instead of Lucy.

"Yes," was her reply, given with characteristic simplicity; but Lucy's voice is far superior to mine."

"Nonsense, Ella," exclaimed the latter, laughing and frowning; "why should you underrate your vocal powers? I have often assured you that I would willingly exchange my loud, harsh——"

"It is you who are talking nonsense now, my dear," quietly interrupted Lady Stanley; "Ella's singing is, I am well aware, always liked; but though she has without doubt a very sweet silver-toned voice, it cannot for a moment be compared to your own."

"That fact has been long known to every one except herself, mamma," said Ella, lifting her eyes and fixing them upon her sister's face with a look of such deep and tender affection, such perfect good nature, and such pure and unselfish consideration, that Herbert instinctively felt as if she had by that one trifling action revealed more of her inner character than he had yet seen.

"She is not the beautiful statue I at first thought her," was his mental comment, as he continued to gaze upon her changing countenance; "neither is she deficient in kindness or warm-hearted devotion. Where she loves, she loves long and well, and is capable, if I read that glance aright, of making any personal sacrifice for the sake of others; I cannot now wonder at Edward's partiality——"

A low silvery laugh broke in upon his reflections, and he turned to encounter the scrutiny of Lucy's mischief-loving eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said, somewhat confusedly; "did you speak?"

"Yes; I was reminding you that we have done our part towards the morning's entertainment; now it is your turn."

"I thought you were going to favour us with a song," returned Herbert.

"Really, the more one indulges you, the more exacting you become," cried Lucy, in feigned amazement; "but we are not inclined to give you your own way in this instance. Otherwise," she continued, glancing at her watch, "we should not leave you sufficient time to fulfil your promise. Perhaps, however, a few songs may be forthcoming this evening."

"In that case I must be patient, I suppose," said Herbert; "and in the meantime I shall be happy to obey your commands, merely premising that, although a great lover of music, I am never satisfied with my own execution."

"But if others happen to be satisfied, you have no reason to complain," was the prompt rejoinder.

Herbert did not reply except by a depreciatory gesture; and as he proceeded to open the organ, Lucy observed in a low tone to her mother—

"Is it possible that he actually entertains this erroneous idea of his playing? Surely he cannot be altogether unconscious of the talent with which he is so richly endowed."

"I will reserve my judgment until I hear him," replied Lady Stanley, in the same suppressed tone; "but you may be very sure that he would not on any consideration stoop to equivocate or designedly wish to deceive you; if, therefore, his musical skill is such as you describe it, his unwillingness to admit the fact must proceed, I should think, from the same feeling of humility which seems at all times to characterise him."

"Still," returned Lucy, thoughtfully for her, "there is a nameless something in his lofty bearing, together with an occasional curl of the lip (evidently quite involuntary), and quick flash of the eye, which makes me fancy that he is not wanting in a certain kind of pride, though I have not yet been able to ascertain——"

"Hush!" said Lady Stanley, softly, as a few harmonious notes fell soothingly upon her ear, gradually increasing in sound and volume until the silent room was filled with glorious melody.

Five minutes later they were rejoined by Sir Edward, who, after quietly opening the door, and glancing eagerly around him, stood like one entranced, breathlessly listening to the music, as it rose and fell—now swelling into loud, deep tones of solemn grandeur—now softly floating past them in gentle modulated strains of exquisite sweetness and indescribable pathos!

Neither of them spoke or moved, till, having finished his task, Herbert calmly rose from his seat, and closed the organ-lid.

"Now, mamma, was I not right?" cried Lucy, triumphantly.

"You were, indeed," she answered, smiling pleasantly; "it is quite a treat to listen to such music."

"By the bye, Edward," continued the young lady, accosting him as he was advancing to speak to Herbert, "how is it that in enumerating your friend's 'exalted merits'"—here she glanced laughingly at Herbert, as if to remind him that she was quoting his own words—"you omitted to mention this accomplishment?"

"Because it was unknown to myself," replied Sir Edward, "else

I should certainly have spoken of it. You must tell us the secret of your success," he added, turning with much earnestness to Herbert: "what is it that gives you such marvellous power over the instrument?"

"I am afraid," said Herbert,—a smile of amused incredulity coming to his lips,—"there are not many besides yourself who would suspect me of possessing this wonderful power."

Sir Edward shook his head.

"However much *I* might practise," he thoughtfully rejoined, "I could never hope to acquire a tithe of your skill."

"Do you play these?" inquired his friend, opening a volume of sacred music, containing selections from the most celebrated and sublime compositions of the old masters.

"Some of them: we can get through 'Oh, rest in the Lord:' 'Zion spreadeth her hands for aid;' 'O come, every one that thirsteth:' and others of the same kind, very well; but Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which we are now learning, is not so easily mastered."

"I dare say Mr. Seymour will assist us, Edward," exclaimed Lucy, eagerly; "and then we may perhaps make a little more progress than we have yet done."

"An excellent idea," said her brother, with animation. "Can we induce you to undertake the office, Herbert?"

"It will afford me the greatest pleasure," was the cheerful response.

"Oh, thank you," cried Lucy; "when shall we begin, mamma?"

"Whenever you like, my dear; but I would suggest that, as Edward has obtained Dr. Gibson's permission to show Mr. Seymour what is worth seeing in the neighbourhood, we ought to have luncheon immediately, so that there may be time for a long drive before dinner."

Thus saying, Lady Stanley left her seat, and taking Herbert's arm, led the way to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANOTHER DROP OF BITTERNESS TO HERBERT'S CUP.

"Tribulation patience works,
Hope from thence we borrow;
Such the hidden good that lurks
In dark days of sorrow."

THE week which Herbert had resolved should terminate his visit passed away, and two others followed, before he finally left the hospitable roof of his kind friends.

This lengthened stay proved of great benefit to him, both mentally and physically; for, though he was now well enough to dispense with the professional services of Dr. Gibson, and could not complain of any particular symptom of remaining illness, he still found himself subject to constant fits of unaccountable weariness and lassitude; and it is possible that had he been left entirely to his own companionship at this time, he would have endured much additional suffering, and perhaps relapsed into a state of severe mental depression.

But Sir Edward tried by every means in his power to dissipate the effects of his recent sickness, and call his thoughts from the melancholy regions of the past. He saw, without being told, that it was often a great effort for Herbert to join them in their walks and drives; and his kind heart experienced a pang of sorrow as he noted the expression of intense pain which would sometimes overspread his noble countenance even in the midst of his most agreeable occupations.

Still, though the young baronet did much towards alleviating his grief, Lucy and Ella unconsciously did more. They—especially the former—kept him perpetually employed, scarcely allowing him a moment for indulging in those morbid reflections which could only be productive of unnecessary disquietude and bitter regret.

Every day witnessed the planning of some new scheme of pleasure, or the accomplishment of some cherished design; while Lucy's fertile brain invented a hundred novel kinds of amusement; and the joyous gaiety of her disposition, her sparkling humour, and unfailing flow of girlish spirits, united to render her a truly valuable acquisition in the various excursions they undertook for the purpose of introducing Herbert to some of their numerous friends, besides making him better acquainted with the scenery round about Lanchester; until at length he began almost imperceptibly to recover something of his former cheerfulness and animation.

Occasionally, it is true, the sight of Lady Stanley's placid face, as her eyes rested with mingled complacency and affection upon her children, would nearly unman him, by causing the deep surgings of bygone emotions to revisit his memory so freshly and distinctly that it seemed but yesterday since he too had in like manner been the object of a fond mother's tender regard, and the happy recipient of her devoted love.

And then an unutterable feeling of loneliness would silently steal into his heart, and he longed—oh, how fervently!—for one brief glimpse of that face which was to him as yet the fairest and best beloved of any, and to hear once more her well-remembered voice whispering soft words of loving endearment.

The strange interest with which he regarded her at these times did not escape Lady Stanley's notice; and, though she studiously avoided alluding, either by word or look, to the subject, there was an added tenderness in her manner towards him, and an unwonted gentleness in her tones whenever she addressed him, which proved that her kind heart was touched with sincere compassion for his sufferings.

One evening he felt unusually depressed in spirit.

He had written again and again to his friend Charles Hastings, earnestly imploring him to give him some imformation respecting his mother, and also inclosing several notes to herself; but as he had hitherto received no answer to his communications, he concluded that he too had left England, probably at the same time, and in company with Mr. and Mrs. Seymour. As long as he entertained this persuasion he was comparatively happy, knowing that in the society of the careless, good-humoured young man, whose animated versatility and undaunted perseverance in the pursuit of amusement often infected those around him, the poor lady would feel less keenly the loss of her own son, and become, not *reconciled*, for that she would never be, nor *resigned*—years must elapse ere she could submissively acquiesce in the sad fate which had befallen her—but *accustomed* to the separation.

On the day to which I refer, however, Herbert was undeceived. He had just returned with Sir Edward and the young ladies from a long drive, and was hurrying to his room, when a servant met him, and handing him rather a bulky missive, said, respectfully—

"Your own man brought this about half an hour ago, sir, and desired me to give it to you directly I saw you."

"Thank you," replied Herbert, outwardly composed, though his pulse quickened considerably, and his heart beat with expectation.

Without another word he passed on; but no sooner had he shut himself up in his apartment, than he gazed anxiously at the handwriting, which he instantly recognised as belonging to Mr. Hastings.

With trembling eagerness he tore open the cover, and as he did so several inclosures fell at his feet.

His feelings may be better imagined than described when, on hastily gathering them up, he perceived that they were the very letters he had from time to time written to his mother.

A blank, bewildered look came to his face, and for the space of some minutes he stood vacantly staring before him, apparently incapable of reflection. Theu a low stifled cry of anguish escaped his lips; and, sinking down in a chair, he covered his face with his hands, and tried to still the tempest of grief which had so suddenly arisen within his breast.

Presently he lifted his head, and his countenance, pale, grave, and sad, bore the indisputable impress of acute but patient suffering.

Not until he had counted these sealed letters, glanced briefly at the address inscribed on each, and laid them one by one aside, did Herbert attempt to decipher the contents of Mr. Hastings' closely written epistle, which occupied several sheets of paper; but this done he at length proceeded to read his friend's explanatory communication

with firm compressed lips, and a contraction of the brow most painful to witness.

And while he is thus engaged in perusing the long, rambling, and, in many respects, unsatisfactory, account of what had transpired in his own and Mr Hastings' family since his departure from Mertonsville, I will, instead of inflicting the same task upon my readers, merely inform them that the latter's apparent neglect had been occasioned by illness, and not design.

In falling from his own favourite horse—a beautiful, though fiery and vicious animal, who had once before thrown him with considerable violence—he sustained such serious injuries, that he was taken up for dead, and lay for weeks without being able to think or speak.

As soon as he was sufficiently recovered, he penned a few lines to Mrs. Seymour, according to the direction she had herself given him, enclosing a letter from Herbert.

To this he received no reply; and after waiting a short time longer he wrote again.

Nor was he more fortunate the second time; in consequence of which he hit upon another scheme that he hoped would prove successful.

He was mistaken. Every plan failed; and at last he boldly wrote to *Mr. Seymour*, saying that as the doctors had recommended him to go abroad for a while he entertained some thoughts of joining them at Constantinople.

The answer soon came—short, polite, but decisive. Mr. Seymour regretted extremely—so he said—that circumstances over which they had no control would unfortunately prevent himself and Mrs. Seymour from having the pleasure of seeing their dear young friend on his arrival at Constantinople, they being, in fact, about to leave that interesting city.

A postscript was added, to the effect that *Mrs.* Seymour begged to return *unopened* the letters which had been sent to her (probably by mistake), and to express a hope that for the future she might be spared the inconvenience of receiving any more such inclosures.

This, then, was the end of his planning; this the result of all the trouble he had taken on his friend's behalf. No wonder that Charles Hastings began to look upon the case as more hopeless than he had at first imagined it to be; and no wonder that Herbert, as he read his discouraging report, and mused upon this fresh instance of Mr. Seymour's implacable disposition, felt his heart sink within him.

A gentle tap at the door disturbed him in the midst of these sorrowful and conflicting thoughts, and with a slight start Herbert dropped the letter, which he still held in his hand, and going slowly forward, mechanically opened it.

"My dear fellow," laughingly exclaimed Sir Edward—for he it was—stepping inside the room, "do you know how late it is? The dinner—but what is the matter?" he continued, instantly changing his tone from gay to grave, on perceiving that his friend looked very pale; "you are certainly ill."

"No, no," said Herbert, trying, though somewhat ineffectually, to conjure up a smile; "I assure you I am quite well, only"—he glanced at the papers, and hastily putting them into his desk, prepared to accompany Sir Edward downstairs—"I have been busily employed, you

see, but that does not of course make my forgetfulness the less inexcusable."

"I think I understand what is wrong," retuned the other, knitting his brows; "you have had bad news. Am I right?" he asked, gazing kindly and earnestly into his face.

"Nothing but what I might have expected," replied Herbert, speaking as cheerfully as he could. "I will tell you about it by-and-by, and then you can judge for yourself. *Now* I must go immediately to Lady Stanley, and apologise for my want of punctuality."

CHAPTER XL.

THE YOUNG BARONET'S DECISION.

"Dead to the world then be,
Its vanity and pride;
To its vain pomp and beauty be
For ever crucified!"

HAD Herbert simply obeyed the dictates of his inclination, he would have preferred absenting himself from Lady Stanley's dinner-table that evening, especially when he found that the usual family party would be augmented by the presence of several guests; but he was so much in the habit of considering what was due to others, rather than what would be the means of contributing to his own pleasure, that he forced back the rising wish almost before it had assumed a definite form in his mind, and, without betraying any peculiarity in his manner or countenance, exerted himself to sustain his part in the conversation with that calmness and intelligence which had never yet abandoned him.

Still it was an effort—greater perhaps than some of my readers can understand—and we shall scarcely blame him if, as the evening wore away, he witnessed the departure of the last remaining guest with secret satisfaction.

"Now we are alone again," said Lady Stanley, turning smilingly towards him. "I hope we have not tired you, but it appears to me that you are looking somewhat paler than usual."

"It is very kind of you to notice my looks," replied Herbert, with emotion; for the gentle tones of her voice, no less than the glance of almost maternal tenderness which accompanied her words, once more had the effect of bringing all too vividly before him the image of his own passionately loved mother.

"I must leave you for a moment," returned the lady, who probably guessed whither his thoughts had flown, "as I think I hear Lucy's voice in the hall, and am fearful lest she should suffer from so thoughtlessly exposing herself to the cold night air."

Having said this, she passed hastily out of the room; and as soon as the door had closed upon her, Herbert, believing himself the only remaining occupant, leaned back in his chair, and heaved an involuntary sigh, an expression of the deepest anguish wandering over his erewhile unruffled features.

He did not know that Ella, instead of having, as he supposed, followed Lucy and her brother downstairs, was at that moment seated on a low ottoman near himself, quietly arranging a portfolio of engravings, while at the same time she was regarding him in mingled surprise and perplexity.

But suddenly an irresistible impulse caused him to turn his head slightly round, and in doing so he encountered her soft eyes fixed full upon him with a world of kindness and sympathy in their expression.

They were instantly withdrawn, however, and the young girl bent her head to conceal her confusion.

Herbert also was palpably embarrassed, and remained for several seconds silent. Then he said, addressing her in his usual tone of frank courtesy, though there was a little tremor in his voice,—

"It is not always possible to control one's feelings."

Ella made no answer, except by lifting a half shy, half questioning glance to his face; and he continued with a melancholy smile, as if certain of being understood,—

"Your sister was rallying me this morning upon the strange interest with which I watch all Lady Stanley's movements; but the fact is, she reminds me so forcibly of my mother, that I find myself at times utterly unable to prevent my eyes from following her, although" —this was added slowly and sadly—"it often gives me more pain than pleasure to be so constantly put in remembrance of one whom I cannot hope to meet for many long years, perhaps"—here his voice sunk to a scarcely audible whisper—"never more in this world."

A tear of sympathy glistened in Ella's eye as she asked gently,—

"Do you really think that mamma bears any resemblance to Mrs. Seymour?"

"In personal appearance they are altogether unlike," replied Herbert, "as you will see by looking at this;" and, to her astonishment, he drew a small velvet case from his pocket, and, opening it, put his mother's portrait into her hand.

"It is very beautiful," she said, after gazing at it for a short time; "you must prize it greatly."

"I do," he answered, with a quick look of anguish, instantly succeeded by an expression of firm determination in his pale, grave countenance and resolutely closed lips.

"You are thinking," said Ella, forgetting her reserve in the wish to comfort him, "how little even the best likeness can compensate for the loss of herself."

"Yes; when *death* robs us of those we love, we know we must submit: whereas the struggle continues longer, and seems harder to——"

He stopped, apparently vexed with himself for having thus alluded to his own situation. Before he could recover his self-possession, Ella remarked in a quiet and considerate tone, glancing once more at the likeness,—

"I suppose it is in *manner* that mamma and Mrs. Seymour resemble each other?"

"You are right," said Herbert, speaking less mournfully, and regarding her with a pleased smile: "there is something also in their way of talking which makes me consider them alike, and in many respects their dispositions are, I think, the same."

"It is very strange," returned Ella, reflecting; "I wish——"

Of the precise nature of her wish, however, Herbert was obliged to remain in ignorance; for the drawing-room door was just then unclosed, and Lady Stanley returned to them, accompanied by Sir Edward and Lucy.

"What have you there?" exclaimed the latter, as Ellen was trying to replace the picture in its sheath. "Diamonds!" she added, seeing them shine and sparkle beneath the brilliantly lighted chandelier.

"I was showing your sister my mother's portrait," said Herbert, holding it out for her inspection.

She examined it with great interest, as did also Sir Edward, who pronounced it an excellent likeness.

Lady Stanley looked at it for a minute or two without uttering a syllable; then she gave it back to Herbert, merely observing,—

"She is still very like what I remember her as a girl."

"You!" cried Herbert, his face suddenly lighting up with animation; "did you ever meet her, dear Lady Stanley?"

"Yes, I knew her well," was the quiet reply.

"But when?" asked Herbert, eagerly.

"Years ago—before either of us married," said Lady Stanley, somewhat hesitatingly.

"And my father?" faltered Herbert—"I mean, Mr. Seymour; were you acquainted with him?"

"No, I had not that pleasure," replied the lady, drawing herself haughtily up, when an indignant flush sprang into her cheek.

Herbert gazed at her in some surprise; but presently his eyes fell, and a deeper shade of gravity overspread his countenance.

He asked no further questions, neither did Lady Stanley volunteer any additional information.

On the contrary, she seemed desirous of changing the subject as soon as possible.

When shortly afterwards they separated for the night, she pressed his hand with more than her usual warmth, and welcomed him the next morning with a scarcely less affectionate greeting than she was in the habit of bestowing upon her own son.

Sir Edward was the last to appear at the breakfast-table, and as he seated himself in his accustomed place opposite Lady Stanley, and took from her hand the cup of coffee she smilingly offered him, Herbert noticed that he looked very thoughtful and serious.

The meal was about two-thirds over when, turning to his elder sister, he said kindly but gravely,—

"Is it possible, my dear Lucy, that you can have consented to go to Mrs. Denham's ball?"

"Why should I not?" asked the lively girl, in a tone of playful defiance.

"There are several reasons," began her brother, impressively.

"Nonsense, Edward," she answered—and a touch of impatience could be detected in her voice—"you must be well aware that it would be ridiculous to expect us to decline the invitation; we have secluded ourselves too long already, and now that we have laid aside our mourning there is not even the shadow of an excuse for refusing to go into society again."

"You say *us*, which means, I suppose, that Ella also is longing to return to these gaieties?"

"Ella must answer for herself," returned Lucy, laughing.

"As far as I am concerned, I care very little about the matter," replied the young girl, hesitatingly. "It is true, I unthinkingly accepted Mrs. Denham's invitation; still——"

"I am ashamed of you, Ella," interrupted her sister, shaking her head reprovingly; "how can you take part with the enemy in that cowardly fashion?"

"I was only going to propose that we should ask mamma's opinion, and be entirely guided by what she says."

"Perhaps Edward will not be satisfied with her decision," said Lucy, in a tone of good-natured malice; for, *entre nous*, I am beginning to suspect that there is something of the tyrant in his disposition."

"Ah!" cried Sir Edward, starting slightly, while his brow contracted as if in pain; "I feared you would put this construction upon my interference."

He paused for a moment, and then went on, speaking in a slow, reluctant way, forcing, as it were, each word from his lips,—"I should be sorry indeed to have the appearance of wishing to deprive you of anything which could possibly add to your happiness; neither is it my intention to prevent you from following the bent of your inclination: in this, as well as in every other respect, you and Ella, therefore, will be perfectly free. But at the same time, I feel it my duty to explain that, after much and serious consideration, I have come to the conclusion that it would not be acting in accordance with my profession were I to allow what in heart I disapprove of to take place in my own house. You may have dinners and musical parties to your heart's content," he added, smiling, "but—*no dancing*."

"I think Edward is right, my love," said Lady Stanley, in answer to the comic look of appeal which Lucy directed towards her; "not of course, that I share in his prejudice against dancing, or agree with him in condemning balls and other similar amusements; still, *with his views*, I do not see how he could act otherwise than he is now doing."

"I am sure we could give them up without making any great sacrifice," remarked Ella, smiling at her brother; "for Lucy and I are always happier at home."

"Speak for yourself, my dear," returned Lucy, assuming an air of well-feigned discontent; "I have no wish whatever to be included in your philosophical observations."

"You are still regarding me in the light of a tyrant, I presume?" said Sir Edward, possessing himself of Lucy's hand as they rose to leave the breakfast-room.

"Certainly," she answered, with a face of suppressed amusement; "what else could you expect? I appeal to you, Mr. Seymour; is he not deserving of the name?"

"In this instance, I should say decidedly *not*," said Herbert, fixing his eyes for a moment upon his friend's resolved countenance, with an expression of the warmest approbation.

Lucy shrugged her shoulders, and went off murmuring to herself, "They are both of one mind, I see, and evidently prepared to support each other's crotchets, however absurd they may be."

CHAPTER XLI.

HERBERT'S NEW HOME.

" Thou neither dost persuade me to seek wealth
For empire's sake, nor empire to affect
For glory's sake." MILTON.

IT was on the evening of a lovely summer's day, that the owner of Herbert Cottage arrived to take up his residence in it.

Words failed him when he strove to express his thanks to Lady Stanley for the tenderness and care she had manifested towards him during his long and painful illness; but his very silence was to her most eloquent, and as he looked at her with a grateful light dilating and deepening his dark eyes, then encouraged by her answering glance of sympathetic kindness, stooped and kissed the hand that rested on his arm, she had some difficulty in maintaining her own composure.

Strange and varied were the emotions which the sight of his new home awakened in his breast; but he checked them, lest they should be perceived by his faithful friend, James Gordon, who had with the utmost care and thoughtful consideration made everything ready for his reception, and was now doing all in his power to render him comfortable.

After remaining for a short time in a pleasant little parlour which Gordon had fitted up as a study, Herbert suggested that they should pay a visit to the other rooms.

" I may as well become acquainted with the extent of my property at once," he said, with a melancholy attempt at a smile.

" I think you will be pleased with the house, sir," remarked Gordon, throwing open the drawing-room door.

Then, seeing Herbert hesitate, and gaze in extreme astonishment and perplexity around him, he hastened to direct his attention to certain alterations which he had been obliged to undertake; hoping thereby to prevent him from too minutely inspecting the furniture.

For a while he succeeded; but he noted with extreme uneasiness that from time to time Herbert's eyes would rest first upon one article, then on another, as if quite unable to comprehend the meaning of their being there at all.

However, Gordon was not easily dismayed; and he resolved that, unless driven to extremity, and really forced to enter into an explanation of the manner in which he had been enabled to get rid of the old furniture, which was perfectly worthless, and replace it by what they now possessed, he would remain obstinately silent on the subject.

When, therefore, Herbert expressed his amazement at finding things so different from what he had anticipated, and questioned him regarding the reason, Gordon instantly assumed a face of such dull unconsciousness, and appeared so little interested in the matter, merely shrugging his shoulders, or uttering the comprehensive word " old fashioned," if he deemed it necesarry to say anything, that the young

man, himself profoundly ignorant of the comparative value of the articles in question, readily concluded that the report he had previously received of their utter uselessness had been unintentionally exaggerated by the lawyer, who had for so many years taken charge of the property.

From *him*, (the lawyer,) James Gordon had nothing to fear, as he was no longer a resident of Lanchester; and the fact of his secret being partially known to Lady Stanley and her son did not cause him the slightest apprehension, as he was well assured that whatever happened *they* would consider themselves bound to keep it inviolate.

To return to Herbert. When he had made a tour of the house, and examined and approved of all that James Gordon had done on his behalf, he came back to the drawing-room.

Gordon followed him; and, pulling aside a wide curtain, which hung across an archway leading into a small though lofty inner apartment, pointed with a smile to the interior.

"Another room!" exclaimed Herbert, advancing a step or two; "I did not notice it before. But what is the meaning of this?" he continued hastily seizing Gordon's arm, and speaking in accents of excessive surprise. "*An organ*! Where did it come from, James?"

"Sir Edward sent it here last week, sir. He said he could think of nothing else so suitable; and he begged me to ask you not to be offended."

"How thoughtful! how kind!" ejaculated Herbert; but it was with a very flushed cheek, and something of a shadow upon his brow; for he remembered that he was already deeply indebted to the generous-hearted young baronet, and regretted being called upon to increase his obligations by accepting this most appropriately-chosen gift.

A period of silence ensued, during which James Gordon quietly withdrew, leaving Herbert standing in front of the instrument—his arms crossed upon his breast, his eyes fixed and meditative.

Soon he roused himself, and began to walk softly up and down the room; but after he had taken a few turns, he again paused opposite the organ, and having almost unconsciously opened it, sat down and tried one of his favourite pieces.

Then the words of a simple hymn from the German, which he had learned years ago, returned to his recollection, as being peculiarly applicable to his present frame of mind; and, skilfully modulating the powerful tones of the instrument, so that it might harmonise with his own voice, he commenced to play and sing the sacred melody.

Perhaps to many of my readers the words of this hymn may be familiar; but as there are others who have probably never seen it, I transcribe three of the verses:

"Heavenward our path still goes,
Sojourners on earth we wander,
Till we reach our blest repose,
In the land of promise yonder;
Here we stay a pilgrim band,
There must be our *fatherland*.

"Heavenward, my soul, arise,
For thou art a heavenly being;
Thou shouldst seek no earthly prize,
When from this world thou art fleeing:

Hearts with heavenly wisdom blest,
Can in heaven alone find rest.

"Heavenward! oh heavenward!
There shall be my lot and treasure;
Let me strive my heart to guard,
From each vain and worldly pleasure;
Heavenward my thoughts shall tend,
Till in heaven my cares shall end."

Directly the last note of the concluding symphony died away, Herbert rose, and walked to the window.

There he remained, motionless as a statue, until the gentle twilight faded into night, and one by one the glimmering stars came shining through the gathering darkness, and the soft summer's breeze changed suddenly into a cold fresh wind, which as it bent the giant branches of the trees into every fantastic form and shape, and swept suddenly past the dwelling, seemed ominously suggestive of an approaching storm.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, sir," said James Gordon's voice close at his side.

"Disturbing me?" repeated Herbert, turning quickly round, "oh, no! I fear I have kept you up later than you like, James."

"Not at all, sir," returned Gordon, as he proceeded to light the lamps.

Herbert watched him with a thoughtful countenance, and when he had finished his task, and was moving towards the door, he stopped him by saying abruptly—

"Wait a moment, James."

The man obeyed; and Herbert, placing a chair for him near the table, and taking another himself, continued,—

"I will not detain you long, my friend; but as this is the first night we have passed here together, I think we ought to spend a few minutes in prayer before we separate."

James Gordon bent his head, and his eyes glittered with supreme satisfaction as he promptly acquiesced in this arrangement, while Herbert drew forth the little pocket Bible he always carried about with him.

Was it chance which led him to open it at these words of solemn significance?—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through, and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

He closed the book without reading another verse; and, looking at Gordon, remarked as it were involuntarily,—

"How beautiful that is, and *how true!*"

Gordon said nothing, but he raised a thoughtful inquiring glance to his face, and Herbert, observing it, went on in a low, agitated, voice—

"Just take your own mother, for an example, James. Supposing she had been whilst on earth the possessor of unbounded wealth, could it have given her health, or peace, or safety, or insured her against pain, affliction, and death? And supposing she had left behind her when she quitted this world, thousands upon thousands of gold, and silver, and houses, and lands of what advantage would that be to her now?

could it increase her joy, or add, even in the smallest measure, to the happiness and felicity of her present condition? Ah, no! thank God, we 'are not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold; but with the precious blood of Christ!' Let *us* therefore, my friend, instead of trusting in earth's 'uncertain riches,' seek to lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life."

While Herbert spoke thus, James Gordon's emotion was indescribable. At first he gave a slight start, and gazed at him as if not perfectly comprehending his meaning; then he grew pale, and his features seemed to work convulsively; and, finally, his head sunk into his hands, and one silent witness of the depth of his feelings appeared in the shape of a tear, which rolled between his fingers.

At the conclusion of the prayer, he was hurrying away, lest his agitation should be observed; but Herbert did not permit him to escape so easily.

"James," he said, coming up to him, and laying a hand kindly upon his shoulder, "have I pained you by making this allusion to your mother?"

"No, sir, no," he answered, in a broken voice, drawing his fingers hastily across his eyes; "you cannot tell how much comfort you have given me."

Herbert surveyed him with a look of mingled surprise and interrogation, and waited a minute or two in the full expectation of hearing him say something more. But, though he was several times on the point of speaking, and it evidently cost him an effort to restrain himself, he left Herbert's presence at length without having again referred to the subject.

"How strange it is that Mr. Herbert should have chosen that particular verse to-night," was his half-muttered soliloquy, as he repaired to his own sleeping apartment. "At first I really thought he must have discovered my secret, and wished to reprove me for so often lamenting that my dear old mother did not live long enough to partake of——"

He stopped, and made a sudden gesture, as if he wanted to get rid of a painful idea, which stirred his heart within him, and brought a faint glow to his bronzed face, and an earnest wistful expression to his eyes, but shortly afterwards his countenance became brilliant with unrepressed enjoyment, and he exclaimed in a tone of unfeigned pleasure, —"Well, I trust I shall be enable to profit by Mr. Herbert's counsel, though I suspect he little knew how suitable that counsel would prove to me in my altered circumstances!"

Are any of my readers curious to find out what James Gordon meant by speaking of his altered circumstances?

The next chapter will probably disclose his secret

CHAPTER XLII.

JAMES GORDON'S SECRET.

"What is friendship? If well founded,
Like some beacon's heavenward glow;
If on false pretensions grounded,
Like the treacherous sand below."

BERNARD BARTON.

IT was still early the following morning when Herbert left his room, and, going downstairs, entered the pleasant little parlour, where he found everything in perfect order, the sunshine brightly streaming in at the open window, and the breakfast-table arranged with faultless nicety.

"What lovely weather this is, James!" was his first-pleased exclamation, as Gordon at that moment made his appearance, bearing a small silver kettle in his hand.

"It is, indeed, sir," answered the latter, cheerfully; "quite a contrast to last night's storm."

"I have been admiring your flowers," continued Herbert, glancing out at the neatly-kept beds; "they do not seem to have suffered. How did you contrive to get such a bountiful supply?"

"Quite easily, sir," said Gordon, looking much gratified, "but I scarcely dared to hope that you would condescend to notice them, after being all your life accustomed to such rare kinds."

"I am afraid you did me injustice, then," said Herbert, with a smile; "for in my eyes *every* kind is beautiful. Besides, unless I greatly err, I can recognise several choice varieties amongst those which adorn yonder border."

"Yes," returned Gordon, somewhat hesitatingly; "as that is a very sheltered situation, I thought I would try the experiment of cultivating a few uncommon plants there."

"They thrive well, do they not?"

"I think so, considering the—— But I was going to ask you whether you would like to have breakfast at once?" added James Gordon, checking himself in the middle of his sentence.

"Whenever you wish," rejoined Herbert, in a tone which implied that he considered the question a very unimportant one.

Without waiting for further permission, Gordon left the room, returning almost immediately with such things as he deemed necessary to complete the preparations for Herbert's comfort, and, having seen the latter supplied with all that he could possibly require, he again retired, notwithstanding the young man's repeated request that he would sit down and share the meal with him.

Towards noon Sir Edward called at the cottage, hoping he should be able to prevail on his friend to accompany him home for the remainder of the day. He thought that if, instead of hastily embracing the life of solitude which awaited him, Herbert were to become gradually habituated to it, the change in his position would be less perceptible and easier to bear.

But on this point our hero's opinion did not coincide with that of Sir Edward. He fancied he had been idle too long already, and, now that his health was re-established, felt it would be inexcusable for him to continue in this state of inactivity and self-indulgence.

Life was, in his estimation, no mere empty name, or shadowy vision, or passing dream; he knew it to be a real, earnest, decisive thing; a *living* truth, a serious responsibility; and so he gratefully but firmly resisted his friend's well-meant solicitations, preferring to look his difficulties in the face, and at once enter upon the performance of those duties which his new sphere of action might impose upon him.

Sir Edward had not been gone many minutes before Herbert went in search of James Gordon.

"My good friend," he said, accosting him with a smile, "I should like to have a little conversation with you. Will you join me in the parlour?"

Gordon looked quickly up at him; but, without betraying the least surprise, he answered, promptly,—

"Certainly sir; I shall be there in a moment."

When he entered the room, he found Herbert sitting at his desk, with several letters and papers scattered over the table.

The young man rose, and, handing him a chair, began in a grave, earnest tone,—

"Do you not think it is now expedient for us to come to some definite understanding in regard to the future, James?"

Gordon briefly assented.

"In the first place, however," pursued Herbert, "I am desirous of again offering you my warmest thanks for the unparalleled devotion and thoroughly disinterested kindness which you have on so many different occasions——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir," exclaimed Gordon, moving uneasily in his seat, and looking confused and disconcerted at this preface; "but I shall consider it a great favour if you will let that pass. I am wholly undeserving of your praise; and when I hear you speak thus it fills me with shame and humiliation, besides reminding me most forcibly of the numerous benefits I have received from yourself."

"Really, James, you are quite an original character," returned Herbert, smiling at his warmth; "what have *I* ever done for you, my friend?"

"Ah! sir, can you ask the question? Don't you know that if I had never seen you, I should have now been either a poor, lost, degraded creature, despised alike by myself and others—hopeless and friendless—wretched and despairing, or——" He paused for a moment, profoundly affected; and it was only by making a powerful effort that he forced himself to proceed—"*or*, what I think is more probable, I should have added to my other crimes by the perpetration of a still blacker one!"

"To what do you allude?" asked Herbert, startled and interested.

"SUICIDE!" he answered, in a scarcely articulate whisper.

"Impossible!" said Herbert, shuddering. "I cannot believe," he added, in a consolatory tone, "you would ever have been brought to contemplate *that* sad step."

"This proves how little you know me," replied Gordon, with a melancholy bend of the head, and a faint, mysterious smile. "Look here, sir!"—and taking from his pocket a small round box, he removed the cover, and displayed a bottle full of laudanum!

"I do not comprehend you," faltered Herbert, whose countenance expressed both horror and amazement; "what is your object in carrying that about with you?"

"Well, sir, I am going to tell you," said Gordon, heaving a sigh of bitter regret, as he carefully returned the bottle to its box. "When I reached England, after so many years' absence, almost the first person I happened to meet was an old acquaintance of my mother, and, although he had evidently no recollection of myself, I at once addressed him, and eagerly inquired whether she was still alive. He told me he had not seen her for a long time, and that, from information he obtained regarding her a few months previously, he fully believed her to be dead.

"On hearing this, I hastily left him, and entering the nearest chemist's shop, spent my last shilling in purchasing a bottle of laudanum, with which I intended to put an end to my miserable existence. I should have carried out my wicked design then and there, but for a strange longing which came over me to pay one more visit to the home of my childhood, and have the gloomy satisfaction of beholding my mother's grave.

"Accordingly I set out, performing the journey from London to Mertonsville on foot, and arrived, as you know, only just in time——"

"Yes, yes; I remember," said Herbert, soothingly, on perceiving the convulsive movement on Gordon's face; "it was a trying scene for you, my poor friend. Still, you have great reason to be thankful that you *were* in time."

Both remained silent for a little space, and then Herbert, seeing that his companion's emotion had subsided, went on in a lighter tone than he had yet used,—

"You must admit, James, that what you have told me serves to evince the correctness of my opinion."

"How, sir?" inquired the other earnestly.

"Why, by your own statement, the obligations to which you so touchingly allude are, as far as they bear any reference to me, simply imaginary."

"Ah," said Gordon, rousing himself, "I have not finished my explanation. It would be useless for me to attempt to describe what I suffered during the night succeeding my mother's death: such terrible anguish I hope never to experience again. Not once, or twice, but a hundred times I felt tempted to swallow the deadly draught; but althongh the bottle was at my very lips, and the desire to drain its contents increased each moment, I found myself literally *unable* to complete my purpose: your image, sir, came incessantly before me."

"O James!" exclaimed Herbert, half reproachfully.

But without paying the slightest heed to this interruption, Gordon continued,—

"Your words, and looks, and tones all combined to produce an abiding impression upon my mind. If you had appeared to shrink from me, or if you had even gone so far as to treat me with undisguised scorn and contempt, I should probably have borne it with

sullen indifference; but when I saw you—instead of standing aloof, as if proudly conscious of your own superiority and the immeasurable distance between us—coming forward, and putting your hand kindly upon my shoulder, while you addressed me, not in accents of well-merited reproof, but in tender, pitiful language, such as showed that you could and did feel for me, notwithstanding my unworthiness; and when, after my mother had breathed her last, you tried to comfort me, and ended at length by promising to call on us as early as possible the next morning, I must have been less than human had I remained utterly unmoved; though it was not until I found myself alone—my aunt having retired to get a little sleep, and the house being still and silent as the grave—that I began to realize their power. *Then*, as I said before, I remembered your words, and whenever I carried the poison to my lips, they seemed like an invisible hand to hold me back. Instinctively I felt that you would be grieved and disappointed, when you heard what had occurred, and it was *this thought* which prevented me from actually committing the sin of which I had already in heart been guilty. So you see, sir, I was right in saying that *you* were the cause of all the happiness and prosperity I have since enjoyed."

"Indeed, I am far from agreeing with you on this subject," said Herbert, dissentingly. "Were you ever afterward assailed by the same form of temptation?" he asked, in a voice of exceeding gentleness.

"Yes," replied Gordon, softly; "once."

Herbert looked questioningly at him, and he exclaimed,—

"It was while smarting under Mr. Gibson's bitter threats and taunts, when he informed me of the orders he had received from Mr. Seymour as to my leaving Mertonsville."

"You were then one of God's children?" remarked Herbert, somewhat anxiously.

"True, sir; but Satan's devices are many," was the simple reply.

"And on that occasion?" said Herbert, thoughtfully.

"Although the conflict was less fierce, it might nevertheless have terminated differently, had it not been for your opportune arrival at my mother's cottage."

"What a strangely exaggerated idea you have formed of me!" said Herbert, with a half-amused, half-vexed smile. "I wish I could convince you of your mistake."

James shook his head, as if to signify the hopelessness of attempting it, and another interval of silence ensued, ended by his saying, with eager abruptness,—

"You wished to speak of the future, sir; may I take the liberty of making a simple proposition?"

"Assuredly," answered Herbert, in a tone of encouragement; "why do you hesitate?"

"Because I am fearful lest you should deem me unreasonable or impertinent in what I am about to suggest."

"A very improbable supposition," said Herbert, quietly.

"You remember my Aunt Rachel, sir?"

"Perfectly," replied the young man, smiling at the question.

"About six months ago she lost her husband, and, as she was unable to carry on the business he had been engaged in, I persuaded her to give it up, and undertake something that would be more likely to suit her. Just at this time, however, I very unexpectedly received a

certain sum of money, which had been left to me by a gentleman in America, as a reward for a trifling service I was fortunately able to render him; and this gave me the means of partially providing for her comfort. She is now in Lanchester, and it has occurred to us both that we would save the expense of house-rent, and otherwise derive much advantage, if you could consent to our residing and superintending the work in your cottage."

"It is *I* who would profit by such an arrangement, not you," said Herbert.

"You are quite wrong, sir," cried Gordon, hastily, "for it is the greatest boon I can ask, to be permitted to have a home with you; and as to my aunt, she thinks the same, and is perfectly miserable unless in some way employed."

"If I could really hope to make you comfortable," said Herbert, reflectingly, "I should not pause a moment before accepting your offer, as I have no taste for housekeeping, and am lamentably deficient in the requisite knowledge of its details, and of money matters connected with it."

"Then you agree, sir?" exclaimed Gordon, a glow of delight overspreading his face.

"I believe I must," replied Herbert, smilingly; "the prospect of having some one on whom I can so thoroughly rely is too tempting to be refused!"

Although James Gordon was particularly desirous of keeping Herbert in ignorance of his exact circumstances, the same precaution need not be observed in regard to my readers, and I will therefore mention for their private information that the "trifling service" he spoke of was nothing less than having on two different occasions saved the life of an eccentric gentleman, who was in the habit of wandering alone and unarmed across the wild western prairies, where he was attacked the first time by a band of desperadoes, who, after plundering him of all he possessed, left him bound and bleeding at the foot of a tree—the only one which could be seen for miles around.

There Gordon found him, lifted him upon his shoulder, carried him at considerable personal inconvenience to his own miserable hut, and nursed him night and day through a malignant fever, which constantly threatened to end his existence.

On his recovery, the gentleman, with his usual eccentricity, expressed no satisfaction at his life being thus miraculously preserved, and did not utter a word of thanks to his deliverer; but the latter scarcely wondered at this, so much had he become accustomed to behold mankind in its most repellent aspect; and when, a few months later, he again had an opportunity of serving him, he instantly availed himself of it. On this second occasion, his apparently ungrateful debtor was the victim of a fiery horse, who, sooner than obey his rider's commands, plunged and reared so violently that the unfortunate man was suddenly thrown from the saddle, and precipitated into the river, on the banks of which they had been travelling!

Once more James Gordon's efforts were crowned with success, and still the gentleman for whom he had risked his life seemed utterly indifferent and unthankful. Yet it was not so in reality; for when this whimsical personage died, it was found that he had left the whole of his fortune to James Gordon!

blot out the remembrance of his past privations by the splendid and sumptuous manner in which he now lived.

Perhaps he succeeded.

He certainly had no reason to murmur at the reception which he met with from those whose plaudits he was the most eager to gain, though whether the honour of being invited to their houses and appearing from time to time in their society was sufficient to compensate for the labour and expense he had so lavishly incurred before enjoying this coveted distinction is doubtful.

His next step was to choose a suitable wife; and this he managed quite characteristically. His pride having unfortunately grown in proportion to his popularity, he wrote a curt, heartless letter to a lady—the daughter of one of his former employers—to whom he had been for some time paying his addresses, informing her that circumstances had lately occurred which rendered it inexpedient for him to fulfil his engagement to herself! He felt bound, he said, to sacrifice his own personal feelings, for the sake of his family; and therefore he had resolved on forming an alliance with a highly connected young widow, who, in consideration of his great wealth, had agreed to overlook his early disadvantages, and bestow upon him, not only her own hand, but also the happiness of providing for her two children!

It may be presumed that Mr. Snapson was by no means overpowered with gratitude at this last-mentioned privilege—indeed, remembering the inconsistencies of human nature, I will not venture to affirm that he would have rejected the opportunity of dispensing with it altogether, had any plausible excuse for doing so presented itself to his mind.

This was, however, out of the question; for the lady's former husband had, by a strange caprice, left nothing to his children, but everything to herself; and that only on condition that if at any time she changed her estate, the property, which was not large, should revert to another branch of the family.

In writing to Miss Sinden—the one whom he had so coolly forsaken—Mr. Snapson avoided explaining these particulars. He simply told her his intentions, in plain, forcible language, and left her to submit—passively or otherwise, just as the case might be.

And she did submit. Her chief feeling, after the first shock had passed away, was that of thankfulness, at having escaped the lot of being his wife. For her good sense and clear judgment showed her that it *could* be nothing short of misery to pledge her faith to a man, and discover when too late to repair the error that she had wholly misinterpreted his disposition and character.

And though a few rebellious tears trickled down her cheeks at the thought, not of wealth or station, which ought to have been hers (unlike the generality of her sex, she cared very little for these things), but because of disappointed hopes and misplaced confidence and affection, she promptly collected the letters she had at various times received from her faithless lover, and several trifling presents he had made her, and despatched them with all speed to his residence, unaccompanied by a word of anger or reproach.

Ten days later the marriage of Mr. Snapson with the Hon. Mrs. Grey was announced in the London papers, as having been celebrated with all the usual formalities at St. George's, Hanover Square;

and immediately after the performance of the ceremony, the happy couple started for the Continent, where their stay was somewhat protracted.

On returning to England Mr. Snapson's passion for money-making revived; not that he evinced the least inclination to relapse into his old state of penuriousness—on the contrary, he would have been irremediably offended had any reference been made to this period of his history; but the love of gain had become so fixed. and rooted in his mind, that it was well-nigh impossible for him to overcome a habit which seemed to have grown with his growth, and strengthened with his strength.

Erecting this factory near Lanchester was one of his many speculations; and, in order that he might be enabled to satisfy himself as to the practical working of the establishment, he built a handsome dwelling-house close at hand, with the intention of residing in it for some months every year, or until his personal supervision should be no longer required.

He was settled there with his wife and family when our hero first arrived at Herbert Cottage, the garden of which was on one side separated only by palings from the park belonging to the Snapson mansion. Besides the two children (a son and daughter now grown up) for whom Mr. Snapson had so generously undertaken to provide, he was blessed with four of his own; the eldest being a boy about twelve years of age, and the rest girls.

The latter were in his estimation of very little consequence when compared with this boy, on whom he freely lavished all the tenderness and affection which his heart was capable of bestowing. The fact of his being his only hope in founding a family, and as such, his sole heir, would sufficiently account for this extreme partiality; for Mr. Snapson was selfish even in his idolatry!

It could scarcely be expected that Herbert, unknown to them as he was, should have been deemed worthy of the notice of his purse-proud neighbours.

Occasionally he met Mr. Snapson (on his way to or from the miserable cottages he so often visited), sometimes accompanied by his stepson, oftener still alone; but, except by a cold, inquisitive, or supercilious glance, they neither of them seemed disposed to seek his acquaintance.

One day, however, Mrs. Snapson was taking a short stroll in her park, when she observed a handsome carriage standing at the gate of Herbert Cottage: and before she could recover from her surprise the house door was suddenly opened by James Gordon, and Sir Edward and Lady Stanley came out. The lady, whom, though not personally known to her, Mrs. Snapson instantly recognised, was leaning on Herbert's arm, talking pleasantly and confidentially with him as they walked towards the carriage; while Sir Edward lingered a few steps behind, for the purpose of speaking to Gordon.

This circumstance, notwithstanding its insignificance, materially altered Mrs. Snapson's opinion of Herbert. All at once she discovered that there was something remarkably gentlemanly and distinguished about him, and that he might probably be an acquisition to their society.

The next day this favourable impression was unexpectedly confirmed in the following manner:—

Herbert had been attending a meeting at some distance from his home, and having on his return stopped for a moment upon a rising ground to admire the view, he heard the sound of rapidly approaching wheels. Presently a carriage appeared, drawn by a pair of spirited, dappled grey horses, over whom the coachman had completely lost control.

Close by the spot where Herbert stood, the equipage came crashing over a heap of stones left for the repairs of the road.

The carriage was upset! the coachman broke his leg in falling from his seat on the box, and lay helpless upon the road; while Mrs. Snapson and her eldest daughter, the occupiers of the carriage, where placed in imminent danger by the furious struggling and kicking of the horses to get free.

Hearing their cries, Herbert rushed to their aid, extricated them from their perilous position, and assisted them in a half-fainting state to the nearest farmhouse; where, after seeing that they would be well taken care of, he left them, promising to return to the scene of the accident, and bring back a report of the injuries which the carriage and horses had sustained, and also superintend the removal of their poor coachman, who was still enduring much and severe pain.

His examination showed him that it would be impossible to use the carriage in its present broken condition. He therefore advised the ladies to remain at the farm until he could order another conveyance for them to be sent from their house.

"Oh, I cannot think of allowing you to take this trouble," said Mrs. Snapson, with considerable *empressement*.

"It will be no trouble," replied Herbert, quietly; "for if I conjecture rightly, your residence is close to my own."

"Unfortunately we are not dressed for walking," returned the lady, glancing down at her white satin shoes.

"So I perceive," said Herbert, smiling slightly, as he movee towards the door; "you may rest assured that I shall execute my commission as speedily as possible."

"But where is Thornton, mamma?" exclaimed the younger lady; "why could not *he* go for the other carriage?"

"Yes, where is he?" echoed Mrs. Snapson, looking surprised and uneasy; "have you sir"—addressing Herbert, who was just leaving the house—"seen my footman?"

"No," answered the young man, with the gravest expression he could command; "but the coachman tells me that he was certainly sitting behind shortly before the horses took fright: he must have tried to save himself by dropping down from the back of the vehicle, and probably got hurt in his fall."

"Well, I am sure he deserves to suffer, for his want of courage!" cried the indignant mistress; "he might have known that our risk was even greater than his own."

"I fear you have not escaped as well as I wished," replied Herbert, observing a cut on her arm, which had hitherto, in their excitement, remained unnoticed.

"Oh, that is nothing," she said, hastily tying her handkerchief around it; "but I tremble to think of the danger which threatened us, and from which your intrepidity saved us."

Herbert bowed—murmured a word or two of satisfaction at having

been at hand to assist them, and, ere Mrs. Snapson could make any rejoinder, he was gone.

After a rapid walk he reached the gates leading into Mr. Snapson's domains, and was hastening to the house, when about half way up the long avenue, he descried that gentleman coming slowly towards him. His attention being wholly engrossed in reading a letter, he did not perceive Herbert, until they met face to face. Then he lifted his head, fixed his keen eyes coldly and scrutinisingly on the young man's face, and, without the slightest movement of recognition or encouragement, stood quite still, as if waiting for Herbert to speak.

CHAPTER XLIV.

MR. SNAPSON TREMBLES FOR HIS HEIR.

"Why looks your Grace so heavily to-day?
If you have tears, prepare to shed them now." SHAKESPEARE.

"His thoughtless youth was winged with vain desires;
His manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights." DRYDEN.

"I BELIEVE I have the pleasure of addressing Mr. Snapson," said our hero, courteously raising his hat.

"That my is my name, sir," was the haughty reply; "though I confess I am not equally well informed as regards your own."

Surprised at this incivility. Herbert unconsciously stepped back a pace, and, drawing himself up very slightly, continued, with that calm dignity of manner which inspires even the most overbearing with respect,—

"I was on my way to the house, but, now that I have seen you, there will, I presume, be no occasion for me to go farther."

Mr. Snapson stiffly inclined his head. However much he might wish to assert his own superiority and importance, he could not help acknowledging to himself that he was in the presence of one who, both in person and address, exhibited all the marks of a thoroughly well-bred and polished gentleman; and he almost regretted not having treated him as such from the beginning.

Herbert followed up the advantage he had gained by proceeding in a tone of irresistible gentleness,—

"My reason for this intrusion can be explained in a few words——"

"Pray do not mention it," interrupted Mr. Snapson, with a sudden accession of politeness; but Herbert went on without hearing him,—

"I am obliged to introduce myself as the bearer of evil tidings——"

"Of what nature?" inquired the sharp-featured gentleman, pressing his thin lips firmly together.

"The carriage in which your wife and daughter were driving has been upset," said Herbert, succinctly, "and they are now stopping at Allen's farm, about three miles hence, and require another conveyance to bring them home."

This intelligence produced a startling impression on Mr. Snapson. He stood for an instant as if stunned by some heavy or unexpected blow—his eyes fixed and stern—his features rigid and immovable—his hands clasped convulsively together.

"And what of my boy?" he demanded hoarsely, clutching Herbert's arm, and gazing wildly and despairingly into his face. "Tell me the worst at once: what has happened to him?"

"Your boy?" repeated Herbert, in astonishment.

"Yes; my son, *my heir!*" vehemently emphasised the gentleman. "Ah! there he is!" he cried almost frantically, on getting a distant glimpse of the men who were at that moment coming slowly forward with the coachman, whom they were carrying up to the house. "I guessed how it would be: the others have escaped; but *he*, alas!——"

He was rushing to meet them, when Herbert, who began to understand the cause of his excitement, said in a firm voice, which at once arrested him,—

"You are mistaken, sir; that is your coachman, whose leg was unfortunately broken in falling from his elevated seat on the box."

"Oh!" said Mr. Snapson, in a tone contrasting strongly, by the utter indifference it indicated as to his *servant's* condition, with the anxiety he had previously displayed. "But my son?" he questioned impatiently.

"Your apprehensions regarding him must be founded upon some misconception," replied Herbert; "he is in all probability safe at home."

"I fear not," said Mr. Snapson, hurriedly; "in fact, I perfectly remember hearing my wife say she intended to take him out with her this afternoon."

"Perhaps she altered her arrangements," suggested Herbert; "for I am quite convinced that the two ladies were alone in the carriage when the accident took place."

A half-articulated cry of relief came from Mr. Snapson's lips. "How can you be sure of that?" he asked eagerly.

"Because I was on the spot, and witnessed the occurrence."

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Snapson, attempting to resume his usual pompous manner; "then it is only proper that I should return you my thanks for any assistance you may have rendered them."

"The little I did merits no thanks," replied Herbert, lightly.

"You will at least allow me the honour of conducting you to my house," remarked the gentleman, moving a step or two in that direction.

"I believe I must ask you to excuse me," said Herbert, smiling pleasantly. "I have an important engagement, which cannot well be postponed; and, as you also are doubtless most anxious to lose no time in sending for your wife and daughter, I will not longer detain you."

While Mr. Snapson was musing whether he ought or ought not to offer him his hand, Herbert solved the difficulty by again raising his hat, after which he went on his way.

Nearly two hours elapsed before he entered his own cottage; for, having promised to visit several sick persons that evening, he would neither allow himself rest nor refreshment until he had fulfilled his engagement.

"I am glad you are come, sir," said James Gordon, meeting him at the door; "I have been expecting you for some time."

"Yes; I was kept later than I anticipated," replied Herbert; "but I hope you did not want me particularly?" he added, observing that Gordon looked grave and thoughtful.

"Well, sir, there is a gentleman upstairs, who appears very anxious to see you."

"A gentleman!" said Herbert, rather regretfully—in his present tired state he would have preferred quietly spending what yet remained of the evening alone to receiving visitors. "Did he not give his name?"

"No, he said it was of little consequence; but I think——" here Gordon paused and gazed wistfully into his face, as if desirous of preparing him for the information; then, lowering his voice, he continued impressively,—"I am almost sure it is Mr. Hastings!"

"Oh, that alters the case!" exclaimed Herbert, with a quick change of countenance, and he bounded up the stairs, merely responding by a slight nod to Gordon's considerate reminder that he would find the tea ready whenever he felt disposed to partake of it, and, opening the drawing-room door, found himself in the presence of his unexpected guest.

It was indeed Charles Hastings, who sprang from a chair at his approach, and wrung his hand with all the fervour of his affectionate nature, although at first sight Herbert was tempted to doubt his identity, so greatly had he changed in appearance since last they met.

His face no longer wore its former healthful hue, but was pale, wan, and thin; his eyes, instead of sparkling with irrepressible mirth, had a wandering, unsettled look, which spoke of disappointment and unhappiness; while the ever-recurring smile that had been wont to light up his whole countenance with brightness and resistless gaiety seemed to have given place to a dull and drooping expression, painfully suggestive of some peculiar kind of suffering—whether mental or bodily it was not easy to decide.

"My poor Charles," said Herbert, looking sorrowfully at him, after their first warm greetings were over, "what you must have gone through! I had no conception that your accident would be attended by such——"

"My accident!" cried his friend, with a short, dry laugh; "was that the last you heard of me?"

"Yes, I have received no tidings neither of nor from you since the letter you wrote me, enclosing the ones returned to you by—Mr. Seymour."

"Then it is left for *me* to acquaint you with the agreeable position in which I am placed," returned Mr. Hastings, moodily.

Herbert, who was by this time truly concerned, came, and laying his hand upon his shoulder with that gentle, soothing touch which his friend already knew so well, said earnestly,—

"If you have anything painful to communicate, dear Charles, let me ask you to put it off until after you have had some refreshment. I am sure you require it," he added, entreatingly, as Charles Hastings made an impetuous gesture of refusal.

"But it is growing late," he objected; "and I——"

"You surely will not think of leaving me to-night," exclaimed Herbert, remonstratingly.

"Would you really wish me to stay?" inquired his friend, raising his head, and speaking more cheerfully.

"I should be excessively disappointed if you did *not*," rejoined Herbert, with energy.

"Very well," he answered, after a moment's hesitation, "it will be a great relief to me to speak of my troubles to one who can sympathise with me."

During the meal—of which Herbert insisted on his partaking, before proceeding to explain the nature of these troubles—Mr. Hastings exerted himself to talk on indifferent topics; but he evidently found it an effort, and appeared glad when at length they returned to the drawing-room, so impatient was he to pour into Herbert's willing ear the history of his misfortunes.

"Now, Charles, I am quite ready to listen to you," said his friend, looking at him with a face of concentrated attention; "what has occurred to distress you?"

"Have you any recollection of my brother Edmund?" asked Mr. Hastings, abruptly.

"Yes," responded Herbert, musingly, "I perfectly remember him."

"So much the better," was his muttered rejoinder; "*having known him*, you will be more likely to comprehend the extent of my grievances."

"But why this allusion to him?" questioned Herbert, whose thoughts were insensibly carried back to the days of his own boyhood.

To Edmund Hastings he had never been particularly attached; for while Charles was easy, affectionate, and amiable, his elder brother, on the contrary, possessed one of those restless, domineering, and selfish dispositions which, whatever else they may gain (and experience not unfrequently teaches us that often in worldly matters they *do* triumph over the good and gentle), rarely win for themselves the love or confidence of those around them.

Sir George Hastings, finding that the unfavourable qualities of his eldest son increased rather than diminished as he grew to man's estate, and that all his efforts to check his evil propensities were utterly fruitless, ceased at length to take any apparent interest in him; and from this time it was obvious to all that *Charles*, and not Edmund, was the object of his father's supreme affection.

Still, Edmund was the *heir:* and, as the property was strictly entailed, Sir George found that he could not make what he considered a proper provision for his favourite son's future comfort, except by curtailing their present expenses, which, on investigation he discovered to be very great.

In pursuance of his design, he instituted a rigorous inquiry into the extent of his liabilities and resources, in order that he might by judicious retrenchments he enabled to reserve a competency for Charles, without depriving his elder brother of the liberal income he had hitherto been accustomed to receive.

But these prudent arrangements were marred and defeated; for Edmund, not content with his appointed ample allowance, recklessly ran deeper and deeper into debt, until, concealment being no longer possible, he presented to his father unpaid bills of such startling magnitude, that Sir George was almost beside himself with surprise, anger, and vexation, and solemnly declared that, though to prevent disgrace he consented to liquidate this enormous amount, he would never be answerable for his debts again, no matter what the consequences might be.

It was perhaps a relief to all parties when, shortly after the adjustment of these difficulties, Edmund expressed a wish to go abroad for a few years.

He was tired of the tame, uneventful life he had hitherto led, he said, and wanted a complete change of scene; to visit new countries and climes, and find amusement and recreation amongst a different class of people. He also hinted that by remaining at home, where so much was expected from him, and where he was exposed to constant temptations from his gay and extravagant companions, it would be totally impossible for him to live within his means.

Sir George, feeling that there was some truth in what he said, and dreading a repetition of his recent unpardonable prodigality, promptly acceded to his request, and did everything to facilitate his departure.

He commenced his wanderings; and for two years his friends heard

from him only at long intervals; but he regularly drew upon the bankers when the funds at his disposal became due, and appeared quite satisfied with his new mode of living.

At the end of that time, however, he wrote a short hurried letter to his father, the purport of which occasioned Sir George considerable alarm.

It was dated from Alexandria, where he had been staying for some weeks, and contained a melancholy account of the ravages made by cholera in that city, and his own fears lest he should take the disease.

The next mail brought intelligence of his death, together with a few particulars regarding his last moments.

The writer, a friendly Irishman (whom Edmund had mentioned in one of his letters as having been his fellow-traveller), informed Sir George that they had made all their preparations, and were in the very act of leaving the place, when his poor friend was suddenly stricken with the awful scourge, and in the course of four hours he had ceased to breathe!

Sir George Hastings could not fail to feel greatly shocked by this unexpected calamity; but soon he consoled himself with the thought that *Charles* was yet spared to him, and likely to do much more credit as heir to the property than his ill-starred brother.

* * * * * *

"But why this allusion to Edmund, Charles?" repeated Herbert, coming out to his reverie; "I should think it must be nearly eight years since he died."

"He is not dead—would to God he were!" exclaimed Mr. Hastings, in a tone that made Herbert start.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHARLES HASTINGS IN TROUBLE.

"Since earthly joy abideth never,
Work for the joy that lasteth ever;
For other joy is all but vain,
All earthly joy returns in pain." DUNBAR.

"*Not dead!*" and Herbert gazed at him with mingled apprehension, incredulity, and pity, as if fully persuaded that his poor friend was labouring under an attack of insanity.

"I assure you I am speaking nothing but the truth," returned Mr. Hastings, in a somewhat calmer tone, although a very decided touch of impatience could still be detected in it.

"Go on," said Herbert, softly touching his hand; "tell me how you discovered this, and when."

Charles Hastings sighed profoundly, and an expression of grave melancholy, which was by no means natural to him, overspread his countenance.

"About three months ago," he replied, passing his handkerchief across his moist brow, and slowly accentuating his words, "my father gave a large entertainment on the anniversary of my birthday. Everything went off pleasantly until late in the evening, when the door of the apartment where most of the guests were assembled was thrown open, and a servant announced in a distinct and sonorous voice,—

"'*Mr. Edmund Hastings.*'"

Herbert uttered an involuntary ejaculation of surprise, and his friend continued,—

"I am wholly incapable of describing the general astonishment and consternation which prevailed as my reckless brother advanced, and introduced himself to the company with a complacent smile upon his lips, and the same cool and self-possessed manner he would have assumed on any ordinary occasion.

"My aunt, seeing, as she supposed, one risen from the dead, fainted.

"My father started, grew pale, and was obliged to lean against a delicately carved table for support, which being previously burdened by some rare specimens of Egyptian porcelain, fell with a crash, and the fragile ornaments were shattered into a hundred pieces.

"Amid the confusion that ensued, Edmund alone remained unmoved. Holding out his hand to Sir George, he calmly inquired after his health, expressed himself delighted at having arrived in time to add his own congratulation to those which he doubted not his *younger* brother (you should have heard the peculiar emphasis which he affixed to this word) had already received, and then he looked around for me.

"He did not at once recognise me, for I had grown out of his knowledge; but I stepped mechanically forward, and never shall I

forget the triumphant expression of his face, nor the mocking irony of his voice, as he begged me to accept his best wishes for my future happiness and progress.

"I tried in vain to reply. The words I would have spoken died away in a husky and unintelligible whisper; and it was as much as I could do to maintain even the semblance of composure. I think, indeed, I must have quite given way, had I not caught a momentary glimpse of the utter helplessness and agony depicted upon my beloved father's countenance; and, knowing that it was for me he grieved, I determined not to allow him to see how deeply I also was moved by this sudden and mysterious appearance.

"You will do me the injustice to believe," he added with a sombre air, "that it was not the mere fact of Edmund's return, and consequently of the changed aspect of my own worldly prospects, which affected me. But when I reflected upon his inexcusable conduct—first, in pretending that he had died, allowing us for eight years to remain under this impression, and thus compelling his father and me to commit various illegal acts in the management of the property; and, secondly, in purposely selecting such an unseasonable time and place for reasserting his rights—I could hardly restrain my indignation."

"It was disgraceful conduct!" said Herbert, with emphatic warmth; "do you really suppose him guilty of *malice prepense?*"

"Certes; he confessed it himself," answered Mr. Hastings, vehemently. "When I saw him alone, I remonstrated with him on the public manner in which he had seen fit to announce his arrival, and with an exultant laugh he replied that his object was to create a sensation. God knows he succeeded in his wish," muttered the young man, bitterly.

"But regarding his past history," questioned Herbert, seriously; "how does he account for his long absence? and what motive can he ascribe for leading you to think him dead?"

"Oh, it was a trick," cried Charles Hastings, wrathfully, his cheeks colouring with shame and anger—"a mean, pitiful trick."

"And his illness?"

"A simple fabrication. It is true he was staying at Alexandria when my father received his last letter, and it is likewise true that he entertained some fears lest he should fall a victim to the cholera. However, he escaped; but his servant, having caught the dangerous epidemic and died, Edmund resolved on alleging that it was himself. Accordingly, to prevent us from detecting the *ruse*, he had the poor fellow interred under the name of Hastings, and employed a person to insert a notice of the death in the English newspapers."

"Really this is going beyond a joke," said Herbert, in astonishment.

"At all times, and in every company, he repeats the story," continued Mr. Hastings, sadly, "and boasts of his cleverness in having deceived us into believing it."

"What could have incited him to act in such an outrageous manner?" murmured Herbert, thoughtfully.

"Envy, hatred, and malice," rejoined his friend, passionately. "He *envied* me my father's affection; *hated* me as the innocent cause of his being checked in his career of reckless extravagance; and, in order to gratify his *malice*, and revenge his fancied wrongs, he delibe-

rately determined on humbling me by heaping these unheard-of indignities upon my head.

"You cannot conceive half the suffering I have endured since Edmund's return," he went on with increased vehemence. "Instead of having improved in character, he has grown much worse; for, though he can still appear and act like a gentleman, when it pleases him to do so, his manner towards myself is uniformly domineering and overbearing.

"As might be anticipated, his old set of dissipated companions have, with few exceptions, again rallied around him; and the artful dexterity with which he imposed upon us all is, in their estimation, a proof of inimitable skill, worthy of the highest commendation.

"If I am at any time brought into their society, a laugh is instantly raised at my expense; while my poor father, who is almost heart-broken, lives in constant dread of being called upon to meet the pecuniary demands which must, he feels sure, sooner or later, be made upon him. Notwithstanding his candour on other subjects, Edmund has not yet condescended to inform us who furnished him with funds during the eight years succeeding his supposed death; but we suspect that Jews, or other money-lenders, have frequently advanced large sums to him on the strength of his prospects."

"It is a sad story," said Herbert, in a tone of heartfelt sympathy; "I cannot tell you how grieved I am."

"Ah! I have not told you all," cried Mr. Hastings, evidently subjecting his passion by the most rigorous self-command; "the hardest stroke is yet to come."

Herbert looked and felt intensely interested, but he made no rejoinder; and his friend—still putting a strong curb upon himself, lest he should give utterance to the violent emotion that stirred his very soul with agony—resumed in a low, stifled voice,—

"You have heard of my being engaged to Miss Rosalie Granville:—the day for our marriage actually fixed—and——"

He paused. A heavy cloud rolled over his brow, his lips quivered, and his hands involuntarily clenched!

Herbert gazed anxiously at him, and breathlessly waited for his next words.

They soon came.

"It did not occur to me," proceeded he, in the aforesaid low tone, that this unexpected change of fortune would necessarily involve any difficulty in that quarter; but I was miserably deceived.

"When I next called I saw, not herself, but her mother, the coldness and constraint of whose reception contrasted sadly with her former warmth and kindness. On my inquiring for Rosalie, she seemed considerably embarrassed, and, with a good deal of hesitation, and many regrets, she suggested the propriety of my withdrawing the claim I had on her daughter's hand, as I could never fulfil the conditions on which alone I obtained it!"

"All the arguments I used to induce her to allow things to remain in their present state were unavailing. She listened coolly and disdainfully to my plans for the future, and smiled contemptuously when I spoke of accepting a lucrative appointment I had lately been offered abroad.

"As a last hope, I requested to see Rosalie herself, and take my dismissal from her own lips, but this was peremptorily refused; Mrs.

Granville declared she saw no object in exposing her to the pain and annoyance which such a distressing interview would naturally occasion; while, at the same time, she gave me clearly to understand that I should gain nothing by persisting in making this unreasonable demand, as the young lady knew her duty too well to offer the slightest opposition to the wishes of her parents.

"I had no choice, therefore, but to leave the house; and in the course of the day I received a formal note from Rosalie, asking me to release her from the engagement. The handwriting was certainly hers; still, I could not believe that she wrote it of her own free will, and, before answering it, I resolved on making a final attempt to obtain an interview.

"I chose the evening, as the most likely time for finding her alone; and instead of going round by the principal entrance, as I had done in the morning, I took one of the walks leading through the small, copse-like plantation at the side of their house.

"Presently the sound of voices reached me, and, being in no mood for meeting strangers, I tried to screen myself from observation by stepping behind some tall evergreens until they should have passed by. As I stood thus, looking dejectedly upon the ground, and thinking only of my own troubles, a loud laugh grated harshly and all too familiarly on my ear; and, seized by a feverish dread, I hastily raised my eyes. Within three yards of me were Mrs. Granville and her son-in-law, Mr. Dacey, while Rosalie and my brother brought up the rear, apparently well pleased with each other, and in high spirits. The young lady's face was radiant with smiles, and, though I watched her keenly, I could not detect the faintest trace of sadness or remorse. Of course I made no further effort to ascertain her sentiments; but, returning home, I sent, as desired, a letter annulling our engagement; and, since then, Edmund has never ceased paying her attention, both in public and in private.

"And, now that I have told you all, Herbert, can you blame me if my blood boils in my veins when I reflect upon the conduct of this unnatural brother, and that I am tempted to wish him——"

"Don't repeat that terrible wish," said Herbert, with gentle earnestness; "rather thank God, dear Charles, for having spared him to repent of his wickedness."

"You forget the suffering he has so mercilessly inflicted on me," replied Mr. Hastings, reproachfully.

"No, I admit that he has wronged you most cruelly," said Herbert, and my heart bleeds for you; still——"

"I could have forgiven the rest, if he had not robbed me of Rosalie Granville's affection," observed the much-injured young man, as if arguing the matter with himself.

"Notwithstanding what has transpired, do you still care for her?" inquired Herbert, a little anxiously.

"Yes, fool that I am, I do."

Herbert regarded him for a minute or two without speaking; at length he said, "You will soon get over it, Charles."

A very decided shake of the head and tight pressure of the lips seemed to contradict this assertion; but Herbert went on,—

"Deeply as I feel for you, I have no hesitation in affirming that it would have been a mutual misfortune, had your union with Miss Granville taken place."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Hastings, starting up in the highest degree of excitement.

"Your character, tastes, and habits are totally unlike," said Herbert in a mild, though firm and decided tone. "*Your* warm, eager, impulsive nature could never become assimilated to her cold and calculating spirit; and it is not less true that *she* would weary of your demonstrative affection, than *you* be disgusted with her frigid and unimpressible disposition."

"You seem to have studied us well," remarked Mr. Hastings, interested in spite of his grief.

"I have," returned Herbert, simply; "and, to be candid with you, I often regretted your choice."

"I did not consider her cold," retorted Mr. Hastings, somewhat piqued.

"No," answered his friend, scarcely able to repress a smile; "in your opinion she was all that is good and excellent; and I confess that, judging merely by external appearances, I might have formed the same favourable estimate of her character. But"—this was added very gravely, and with palpable reluctance—"there is such a thing as artificial polish; and although it would be difficult for the most critical eye to discover a fault in Miss Granville's person or manner, I am persuaded that the refinement, grace, and elegance which distinguish her, as well as the smoothness and amiability of her temper, are—not natural, but acquired—the result of education and policy."

"You speak strongly, Herbert," returned Mr. Hastings, contemplating him in gloomy astonishment; "even supposing it to be correct, how could *you* have found out all this?"

"Why, love being proverbially blind," said Herbert, gently, "it was scarcely to be imagined that your eyes would be as clear and unprejudiced as mine. Besides, I have accidentally seen her when she had no object in showing herself kind and polite——"

"How—where?" inquired the discarded lover.

"Among those whom she deemed her inferiors in birth and station," replied Herbert; "and once, again, I marked her conduct to a poor, destitute, and aged widow, who had ventured to solicit her aid. But I have said enough," he added, abruptly; "God forbid that, in trying to show you the little *real* worth of what you have lost, I should overstep the bounds of Christian charity."

CHAPTER XLVI.

TABLE TALK.

"The lopped tree in time may grow again,
Most naked plants renew both fruit and flower,
The sorriest wight may find release of pain,
The driest soil suck in some moistening shower:
Time goes by turns, and chances change by course,
From foul to fair, from better hap to worse.

"The sea of Fortune doth not ever flow;
She draws her favours to the lowest ebb;
Her tides have equal times to come and go;
Her loom doth weave the fine and coarsest web:
No joy so great, but runneth to an end;
No hap so hard, but may in time amend." SOUTHWELL.

THE conversation between the two friends did not terminate until the loud striking of a clock proclaimed it to be midnight. Then Herbert, mindful of the fatiguing journey his guest had accomplished, started up, and urged him to retire to rest.

At that instant the drawing-room door was opened, and a servant appeared with a large Bible, which she silently placed upon the table.

Charles Hastings sank back in his chair on seeing this, and, by a slightly imperative gesture, signified his intention of remaining where he was.

His attitude (as James Gordon and his aunt came in and took their seats) denoted extreme listlessness and dejection; but a thrill of indescribable emotion agitated his frame, and something very closely resembling a tear softened the eyes which had recently flashed with anger and bitterness, when these words—so complete with meaning—so rich in comfort—so calculated to revive the downcast spirit—refresh the weary, and cheer and encourage the suffering—fell like balm upon his wounded heart: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed."

Not that he properly comprehended their purport—albeit he experienced their power in the sudden dispersion, so to speak, of the manifold revengeful and injurious thoughts which his brother's unjust and hateful conduct had engendered within him. Unconsciously his heart responded to the Apostle's loving exhortation, and, his moral perception being thus insensibly quickened, he realized, perhaps for the first time in his life, the momentous fact that trials are not necessarily evils, nor affliction a proof of misfortune.

The next morning his spirits appeared somewhat improved, though he still looked exceedingly pale and ill, so much so that Herbert, after a brief consultation with James Gordon (thinking that the

change would prove beneficial to his health), gave him a cordial invitation to prolong his stay at the cottage.

But, notwithstanding his evident desire to avail himself of his friend's kindness, Charles Hastings could not decide on remaining more than a few days; as he must consult the wishes of the gentleman who had offered him the appointment he spoke of accepting abroad, and might at any moment receive a summons which would oblige him to leave England.

And while he thus proceeds to enter into a full and unreserved explanation of his future purposes and prospects, we will pay a fleeting visit to the mansion of Herbert's wealthy neighbour, Mr. Snapson, who is seated with his wife and family at breakfast.

"My dear," exclaims the lady of the house, languidly stirring her tea, "you must positively call upon Mr. Seymour to-day."

"Indeed," responded her husband, laying down a letter he had been perusing, and taking up another; "I see no particular reason for so doing."

Mrs. Snapson raised her eyes in unfeigned amazement.

"I should have thought," she answered, calmly and deliberately, "that in consideration of the very material service he has rendered us, the least return we can make is to offer him this mark of civility and attention."

Mr. Snapson uttered a nondescript sound of doubtful significance; and his shrewd and clever lady, who possessed a thorough acquaintance with all his peculiarities, and knew precisely what were his weak points, and what motives were the most likely to influence him, clearly perceived that a little *finesse* was necessary. Accordingly, she continued, impressively,—

"I am sure you would be sorry to give him the power of insinuating that you have been lacking in that politeness and courtesy which he might naturally expect to receive from a gentleman of your wealth and standing."

"Have I not already made an advance to him?" demanded her husband, frowning; "and did he not reject it?"

"How?" inquired Mrs. Snapson, blandly.

"By inviting him to accompany me to the house. Besides," added the gentleman, reverting to his former sentence, "we know really nothing about him; he *may* be worthy of our notice, or he may not."

"O papa," began Arabella Grey—the young lady who had shared her mother's danger on the preceding day—"it is too bad of you to say that; one glance is enough to convince——"

But a stern look from Mr. Snapson silenced her, and with a slight shrug and heightened colour, she resumed her breakfast.

"I flatter myself I am not altogether inexperienced in these matters," remarked Mrs. Snapson, in rather an offended tone; "and my own personal observation has completely satisfied me as to Mr. Seymour's position in life. Apart from this, however, the bare fact of his being visited by such persons as Sir Edward and Lady Stanley is sufficient proof of his respectability."

"*Do* they visit him?" asked Mr. Snapson, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes." And she proceeded to relate what she had seen.

"Still," returned her husband, doggedly, "they are no guides for

me. Henry"—looking towards his step-son—"may call, if he likes; but I do not intend to pay him this compliment."

These words were spoken in a tone meant to preclude all further discussion; and Mrs. Snapson, while mentally abjuring his obstinacy, and secretly blaming herself for not having ascertained that his mood was propitious before broaching the subject, actually began to fear she would be obliged to bow to his decision.

She marvelled greatly at the averseness he showed to cultivating Herbert's acquaintance, and felt inclined to resent it as a personal affront.

Her eyes would probably have been opened to the real cause of his seeming unaccountable conduct, had she witnessed the little scene that took place between him and our hero; for her accurate knowledge of Mr. Snapson's character must have admonished her that he could not readily be brought to regard Herbert with complacency, after having allowed him to detect emotion which he would fain have concealed from every eye, and which he had not yet ceased to reproach himself for being surprised into betraying before a stranger.

His feelings towards the latter were therefore of no friendly nature, though he was at a loss to offer any plausible pretext, even to his own mind, for treating him with disrespect or disdain.

But this was not Mr. Snapson's only reason for appearing in an unamiable light that morning. The contents of one or two of his letters had added fuel to the fire, by apprising him of some fresh (and as himself thought, totally unnecessary) expenses, which his fashionable wife had recently incurred, in the refurnishing and embellishing of their town house, and the orders she had given, without consulting him in the matter, for entirely altering and remodelling several of the already beautifully designed apartments, in order to gratify the taste of one of her titled relations.

He made no remark, however, which could lead her to suppose that he was dissatisfied with her proceedings; indeed, he rarely complained of her extravagance; the experience of his married life having convinced him that it was better to submit to it than run the risk of offending, *through her*, the relations whose friendship and affection he was anxious to insure for his son.

It seemed to be tacitly understood between them that so long as he continued to carry on his various money-making pursuits (which Mrs. Snapson and her friends wholly disapproved of), *she* should have the power of counteracting the disadvantages arising therefrom by conducting all arrangements within her particular province in the most elegant, costly, and *recherche* manner.

Having thus plainly stated his determination respecting the proposed visit to Herbert, Mr. Snapson moved his chair from the table, gathered his letters together, thrust them into a large pocket-book, and finally glanced at his watch, introductory to setting out on his daily tour of investigation through his factory.

"How are you thinking of amusing yourself, my son?" he asked, ere he quitted the room, laying his hand fondly upon the head of his young heir, and speaking with unusual gentleness.

"I scarcely know," replied the lad, looking up, and thereby displaying a face which seemed preternaturally old and intelligent; "perhaps, after my lessons are over, I will go with Henry to call upon Mr. Seymour."

"You!" exclaimed his father, eyeing him in unqualified amazement; "would you really care to know him, Albert?"

"Yes; I am sure, from the spirited way mamma says he acted, he must be a brave fellow; and I shall feel proud to make his acquaintance," was the answer, given with an air of dignity, which, coming from any other boy of the same age, would have appeared highly ludicrous.

"We must make the best excuse we can for you," he added, nodding his head sagaciously, "or else, I fear, Mr. Seymour will consider you have acted meanly towards him."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Snapson, half diverted, half annoyed.

"Let me see—what will be the wisest thing to say?" pursued the idolised boy, meditatively. "Oh, I have it!" he cried, clapping his hands; "we can tell Mr. Seymour that you are not well to-day; and *that*, you know——"

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind!" retorted Mr. Snapson, almost sternly: "it is *you*, I suspect, sir"—darting a furious glance at his step-son—"who have been putting these nonsensical notions into the child's head."

"No, papa," returned Albert, quickly, the tears springing to his eyes, for he was warmly attached to his brother. "Don't blame Henry. *I* only deserve——"

"Well, I will blame no one," interrupted the indulgent father, making an effort to recover his equanimity, on observing that the sensitive lad was in danger of being vexed; "and, as I perceive that your boyish curiosity is all alive to see this wonderful neighbour of ours, I suppose I must sacrifice my own pleasure for this once, and accompany you."

"Ah, that is right, papa," cried Albert, approvingly; "we shall like it much better if you are with us; shall we not, Henry?"

"Of course," replied the latter. But, as he had neither forgiven nor forgotten Mr. Snapson's unjust accusation, his tone was not expressive of any great degree of enjoyment, present or prospective.

"How is it that papa manifests such extreme disinclination to become intimate with Mr. Seymour, mamma?" inquired her eldest daughter, after he had left them.

"I cannot myself account for his reluctance," answered the lady, thoughtfully.

"Is there no fear of his altering his mind again?"

"Not the slightest," said Mrs. Snapson, decidedly; "he would never break his promise to Albert."

"I wish he would show his partiality for Albert in a less glaring manner," muttered Arabella, discontentedly. "Just look at Henry; *he* hardly dares open his lips in his presence; while Albert may say and do whatever he pleases."

"I strongly recommend you to be more guarded in your language, Arabella," observed her mother, severely; "recollect you are both entirely dependent, and ought to use every means to conciliate him."

"Does poor Henry gain anything by acting upon this principle, mamma?" asked Arabella, with a scornful curl of her ruby lip.

"That is nothing to the purpose, my dear," retorted Mrs. Snapson, hastily; "perhaps at some future period he may find reason to congratulate himself on having behaved with prudence and circumspection."

An involuntary ejaculation of incredulous dissent, and comprehensive arching of the young lady's eyebrows, was her sole reply.

She had on many previous occasions received a similar lecture on this subject; but, to her mother's surprise and annoyance, she still remained unconvinced of the positive importance of undeviating conformity to Mr. Snapson's wishes, and of cheerfully admitting the wisdom and expediency of plans and arrangements which in heart she considered the very reverse of satisfactory.

Henry, on the other hand, was to proud too offer resistance, ineffectual as it must needs be, to his step-father's ill-judged commands, though his whole soul revolted against them; and, when his sister privately objected to his subserviency, and advised him to follow her example, he laughingly replied,—

> "'The *bending reed*, so slight and frail,
> Escapes the storm, defies the gale;
> The *oak*, that fought the winds, and fell,
> Has no such pleasant tale to tell;'"

adding, more seriously, "The fact is, Arabella, we must learn to bear these minor ills with stoical indifference."

"Do you call them *minor* ills?" exclaimed his sister, fretfully.

"Well, well, my dear," he answered, shrugging his shoulders, "give them any name you please, it is all the same? *Il faut souffrir patiemment ce qui est inevitable.*"

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE POSTSCRIPT.

"Oh, worthless is the bliss the world admires,
And helpless whom the vulgar mightiest deem:
Tasteless fruition, impotent desires,
Pomp, pleasure, pride, how valueless ye seem
When the poor soul awakes, and finds its life a dream!"

HEBER.

IN crossing his spacious hall that afternoon, on his way to join Albert, who was amusing himself on the lawn, Mr. Snapson's keen eye lighted on Henry, standing at the foot of the stairs, waiting for him. From what had passed in the morning, the latter not unnaturally concluded that he was expected to accompany them in their visit to Herbert; and knowing how angry his step-father would be if he were detained a second longer than was absolutely necessary, he took the precaution of being ready some time before they were likely to leave the house.

"Were you thinking of going out?" inquired Mr. Snapson, stopping just in front of him, and speaking in a voice of cold surprise.

The colour mounted to the young man's forehead as he answered,—"I intended to call on Mr. Seymour."

"On Mr. Seymour?" repeated his step-father, dryly.

"Yes; such I understood was your pleasure," said Henry, with a haughty flash, which fired his face for an instant, and then disappeared as swiftly as it had come.

"Oh, I had merely mentioned that, by way of satisfying your mother, when I had no intention of going myself," he loftily replied. "*Now* there is not the slightest occasion for you to accompany us—two are more than enough to call on one gentleman."

Without a word Henry laid down his hat and gloves, and was walking away; but Mr. Snapson, who saw from the hall-door, which stood wide open, that Albert was approaching them, exclaimed in a quick, harsh voice,—

"You will oblige me by stepping into the library, Henry; I wish to speak to you."

Silently he obeyed this request; and his step-father hastily followed him, and, taking a letter from his pocket, handed it to him, observing concisely,—

"I should like you to answer it for me while I am absent—say my time is at present fully employed, and therefore I cannot hope to see him for several weeks—perhaps two months: but after that, I will if possible wait on him."

Having uttered these brief instructions, he withdrew (carefully closing the library door behind him), and hastened to meet his son, who was now clearly close to the house.

"O papa, you have come at last!" he cried delightedly; "but where is Henry? I will run and tell him you are here, and be back in a moment."

"Never mind, Henry," replied his father, taking the reluctant boy by the hand, and drawing him in the opposite direction; "I can't wait for him."

"I assure you he is quite ready, for he told me so half an hour ago—do let me call him, papa;" and he made an ineffective endeavour to snatch his hand from his father's grasp.

"No, no, Albert," returned Mr. Snapson, in a tone that showed he was not to be trifled with. "You must either make up your mind to come without him, or else give up this visit altogether."

Thus admonished, the lad could scarcely do otherwise than proceed; though being, of course, unconscious of his brother's compulsory detention, he cast many impatient glances backward, so long as the house remained in sight, hoping that he would, on discovering their absence, speedily overtake them.

Herbert and his friend were seated in the drawing-room, engaged in earnest confidential discourse, when Mr. Snapson's loud ring resounded through the cottage.

James Gordon, impelled by an unaccountable impulse, stepped forward, and dismissing the maidservant, undertook himself to open the door, and show the visitors upstairs.

Herbert was too well bred to manifest the surprise he really felt at this unexpected visit; and had Mrs. Snapson seen the calmness and self-possession with which he received them, and the unaffected courtesy of his manner, she would have been still more convinced of the justice of the opinion she had expressed regarding him.

Mr. Snapson's own demeanour was not entirely free from embarrassment. He wished, by assuming a cold and indifferent air, to efface the remembrance of the weakness which, in his alarm respecting his favourite son, he unintentionally exhibited on the previous evening; but at the same time he felt bound to advert to the service Herbert had rendered his wife and daughter.

"Pray do not again mention the subject," said Herbert, as he began to offer his thanks for the timely aid he afforded them. "I trust they have not suffered from their fright."

"No; they appear quite well this morning," replied Mr. Snapson, with a little unbending of his stern features.

"And your coachman?" asked Herbert, gently; "I hope he is progressing favourably."

"Thank you, I believe so," returned the gentleman, not caring to confess that he had omitted to make any inquiries as to the unfortunate man's condition.

"This is, I suppose, the son you were so anxious about?" remarked Herbert, smiling kindly on the lad, as he returned to his father's side, after having talked for a short time with Mr. Hastings, whom he found in a very dull and unsociable humour.

"You are right, sir," returned Mr. Snapson, hastily; "he is here at his own request."

"Yes," interposed Albert, probably thinking it quite proper for him to speak; "I wanted to see you—it was so kind of you to get mamma and Arabella out of the carriage. Henry intended to come, too," he went on in his simple yet old-fashioned manner; "but something must have detained him."

"And who is Henry?" asked Herbert, insensibly attracted by his pale, bright-looking countenance.

"Don't you know?" he answered, regarding him with wondering gravity; "Henry is my brother!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Herbert, scarcely able to maintain his own seriousness.

"In appearance, he is something like that gentleman"—pointing to Charles Hastings—"only he does not always look so melancholy," said the boy, in a tone of confidence.

Mr. Snapson frowned, and was about to reprove his son for this indiscreet remark, when Mr. Hastings (observing, as he gazed listlessly out of the window, that a carriage had just stopped at the gate, and feeling very unequal to the task of meeting more strangers) rose abruptly from his seat, and silently left the apartment.

"You cannot judge of my friend by his present appearance," said Herbert, in answer to Albert's words; "he is one of the most lively and gay-hearted persons I ever met with, and generally considered a great acquisition in society, because of the uniform vivacity of his manner and the humour and piquancy of his conversation. But"—slightly hesitating—"the loss of a friend to whom he was strongly attached has unfortunately affected, not only his spirits, but his health."

"Oh, I thought he had perhaps lost his money, he seemed so miserable," returned Albert, with his usual candid simplicity.

"Are there no worse misfortunes than that?" inquired Herbert, more and more astonished at his young visitor's language.

"None that I know of," answered the lad, shaking his head; "I have often heard papa say that money can do nearly everything."

"Except purchase happiness!" smilingly suggested Herbert.

"Ah! but the want of it makes people *un*happy!" was the shrewd rejoinder.

"I am afraid you will discover that my son has been sadly spoilt," remarked Mr. Snapson, rising to take leave.

But almost unconscious of what he did, he resumed his seat, as Gordon opened the drawing-room door, and announced Sir Edward Stanley!

"I have not an instant to spare," cried the young baronet, springing quickly towards Herbert, and taking his outstretched hand in both his own; "I simply wish to remind you of your promise, and——"

"My promise!" echoed Herbert, doubtfully.

"Ah! Lucy was right!" murmured Sir Edward; "she declared that you would forget—*neglect*, I believe, is the word she used—to keep it, if I left it to yourself. Did you not," he added, half reproachfully, "engage to dine with us to-day?"

"I had an idea that it hardly amounted to a promise," replied Herbert.

"And so you would have robbed us of the pleasure of your company, but for my pertinacity?"

"Even now you must not expect me, dear Edward," said his friend, earnestly; "I have a visitor——"

"Yes, Gordon told me that I should find Mr. Hastings with you, and I was rejoiced to hear it. I once met Sir George Hastings at the house of your uncle, General Clare, and liked him much."

"If you could come and spend the day with us to-morrow," proposed Herbert, "I am sure Charles would greatly enjoy your society."

"We must settle to-day's affairs before we speak of to-morrow," returned Sir Edward, laughing; "do try and persuade Mr. Hastings——"

But Herbert was firm.

"It would be nothing short of positive cruelty," he said, in a low tone, "for me to insist on his going among strangers in his present state of health."

"Well, let me ask him himself," exclaimed Sir Edward, eagerly; and, as he glanced for the first time around the room, he became conscious of the presence of Mr. Snapson and his son.

Herbert, seeing the look of unexpressed desire in that gentleman's eye, hastened to introduce him to his friend; and Mr. Snapson, evidently gratified at this mark of attention, remained for a few minutes longer, conversing in great good-humour; and, finally bidding them adieu, he returned home, highly pleased with his visit.

The next day Sir Edward passed some hours at the cottage, and on the one succeeding that he induced Charles Hastings to visit him at his own house.

During the short time his afflicted friend continued under his roof, Herbert was unwearied in his efforts to raise him from the depths of darkness and despair into which his brother's misconduct had plunged him.

Instead of encouraging him to indulge in gloomy retrospections, or morbidly linger upon the aggravated painfulness of his present position, our hero sought rather to awaken his slumbering faculties of mind and will; so that the nobler parts of his character being brought into play, his future career might be marked by a higher and loftier ambition than any which had yet inspired him.

Few could have undertaken this difficult task with the remotest chance of success; for wisdom and discretion were indispensable no less than patience, sincerity, affection, and tact; and Herbert, notwithstanding the influence he possessed over the impulsive, warm-hearted, high-spirited young man, felt at times quite bewildered by the strange contrarieties and intricacies of his erewhile transparent disposition, as well as the obstinate determination he manifested in nourishing his wrongs, and pouring bitter invectives upon their author, and the pettishness and impatient caprice with which he rejected his friend's gentle attempts at consolation.

Still Herbert never once relinquished the object he had in view; and as candour and reason, when conjoined with forbearing tenderness, rarely fail to produce a salutary effect, his labour was not doomed to prove utterly fruitless.

The morning before Mr. Hastings left the cottage, he received a letter from his father, informing him that the vessel by which he intended to proceed to St. Petersburg would sail early the following week, and urging him to return home without delay.

After explaining this part of the letter to Herbert, and expressing his grief at the prospect of their separation, Charles Hastings went on to read a postscript, which had evidently been added in great haste, for the writing was blotted and scarcely legible.

An irrepressible exclamation burst from his parted lips as he glanced at the first few lines, and a deep red flush swept for an instant athwart his pallid countenance, leaving it whiter than before.

The paper dropped from his nerveless grasp; and he sat like one turned to stone, until recalled to his senses by seeing the look of anxious inquiry with which his friend was regarding him.

"My poor, *poor* Charles," said the latter, softly and pitifully, "what new calamity has overtaken you?"

He started, and a convulsive shiver ran through his frame; but presently he stooped, and, recovering the paper, hastily conveyed it to his pocket.

Then, resting his head upon his hands, he remained for a short time perfectly motionless.

At length, rousing himself, he turned to Herbert; and, smiling faintly, said, in a tremulous voice of emotion,—

"Forgive me for keeping you in suspense—I fancied my intellect had become suddenly disordered!"

Having thus augmented instead of diminishing Herbert's perplexity and alarm, he paused, and, springing out of his chair, began to pace the floor in visible agitation, his head drooping listlessly over his chest, his brow bent and stern, his lips quivering with intense excitement!

At the expiration of about ten minutes, a notable change was effected in him. He raised his head, as if proudly conscious of having conquered some tempting suggestion, and advancing with a firm step and resolute air to Herbert, he handed him the letter, saying, hurriedly,—

"You will see by this that Mr. and Mrs. Seymour have now returned to Mertonsville; and—— but read it for yourself. However painful it may be to you, I think you would prefer knowing the exact truth."

Except by an involuntary contraction of his forehead, Herbert testified no unwonted emotion at the contents of Sir George Hastings' communication. It is true he looked a shade paler than usual, and his hand certainly shook when he returned the letter to his friend; but in other respects he was the same as ever, calm and self-possessed.

The words he read were these:—

"Since writing the above, my dear son, I have received a very unexpected visit from Mr. Seymour. He seemed extremely anxious to see yourself; but, on my explaining that you were absent (I did not of course consider it necessary to inform him *where* you are staying), he enjoined me to lose no time in letting you know that immediately on hearing of Edmund's return he had hurried home for the express purpose of offering to adopt and make you his heir!

"I have not time to recapitulate half he said on this subject; but it is evident that he is very much in earnest, and quite prepared to act with the utmost generosity towards you, provided you will agree to add his name to your own.

"He hinted that Mrs. Granville had given him clearly to understand that, in the event of your being recognised as his heir, her daughter's hand would no longer be denied you; for the young lady's feelings are stronger in your favour than she at first supposed.

"I make no comment, not wishing to bias you in a case where your happiness is so much concerned."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CHARLES HASTINGS GOES TO ST. PETERSBURG.

"Worldliness, and apathy, and pride, leave not many that are worthy:
But one who meriteth esteem need never lack a friend.
——— To the diligent labour bringeth blessing;
The thought of duty sweeteneth toil, and travail is as pleasure;
And time spent in doing hath a comfort that is not for the idle."
PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY.

THE two friends stood for several seconds, gazing wistfully and inquiringly into each other's eyes.

At length Herbert broke the silence by saying, affectionately, "I am glad indeed to find that Mr. Seymour's choice has fallen upon you."

Mr. Hastings started back, and looked at him in unfeigned amazement.

"Glad!" he replied, in a short, thick voice, "surely *you* would not advise me to accept this extraordinary offer?"

"Yes, why not?" said Herbert, earnestly; "I should greatly prefer seeing you acknowledged as his heir than a stranger, or one whose society and disposition would probably be uncongenial to my mother——"

"Stop!" cried his friend, almost wildly; "for pity's sake, do not drive me to distraction. I have already suffered enough, in struggling against my own selfishness," he went on, in a voice which trembled with emotion; "for I will confess to you that, at first, I scarcely thought I should have been able to withstand the terrible temptation."

"I fear you are going to sacrifice yourself for a mere punctilio, Charles," returned Herbert, gravely; "if so, I warn you that you may at some future time regret not having acceded to this advantageous proposal."

"Never!" exclaimed the young man, impulsively.

"You must consider everything," pursued Herbert, in the same serious tone. "Don't allow your generous feelings towards myself to influence your decision: remember, you can do *me* no wrong by slipping into the vacant post."

"No wrong, say you! Why, it would be inflicting on you the cruellest and most shameful injury I can conceive of."

"You lose sight of one thing, Charles."

"Which?" he inquired, hastily.

"That though *you* refuse, others will not be so scrupulous. Ask yourself, therefore, whether the reasons in favour of complying with Mr. Seymour's wishes—even as far as I am personally concerned——"

"Herbert, forbear!" interrupted Mr. Hastings; and his face wore an agonised yet resolute expression; "you can tell me nothing but what I have repeated over and over again to myself; it

is useless to urge me further. The wealth of the Indies would fail to satisfy me, if I were compelled in obtaining it to relinquish your friendship; and not even to possess Rosalie Granville, though she is still dearer to me than my life, will I consent to act a dishonourable part towards you!"

Herbert was deeply touched at this strong proof of affection; but he continued for some time longer to bring forward every argument he could think of as likely to induce him to revoke his decision.

At last, finding that he remained inflexible, he dropped the subject by observing, with a little sigh,—

"Well, Charles, if your enthusiastic sense of honour *will* prevent you from viewing this matter in the light I wish, I cannot help it. I hope, however, you will consult Sir George before finally announcing your determination to Mr. Seymour."

"Oh, yes! I may safely promise you that," rejoined Mr. Hastings, cheerfully; "my father is sure to agree with me as to the answer which should be given."

Herbert thought differently. He knew that Sir George Hastings was a high-minded and noble-spirited man; still the idea of seeing his beloved son, without any effort on his own part, thus reinstated in a position similar to that from which he had been so lately and unceremoniously thrust, was too pleasing and gratifying to his fatherly pride and affection to be lightly repudiated.

Lest he *should* partake of his son's scruples, or be withheld from offering him such advice as under other circumstances he would feel justified in bestowing, through any consideration for Herbert, or expectation that he might eventually be restored to his rights, the latter lost no time in writing a letter to the baronet, in which he clearly stated his reasons for wishing that Charles could be persuaded to embrace Mr. Seymour's tempting proposition. He also endeavoured, with infinite kindness and tact, to remove every lingering doubt, by representing the improbability of a reconciliation being brought about between himself and his father; while he explained, that if ever this desirable event *did* occur, it would afford him the opportunity of proving by his conduct how little he valued the property he had lost, in comparison with that father's affection.

A day or two after Charles Hastings had returned home, Sir George wrote a most cordial reply to Herbert's letter. Again and again he repeated his admiration of the nobleness and disinterested generosity which led him to approve of Mr. Seymour's plan, and thanked him for urging his unfortunate friend to profit by it.

As yet, he said, Charles had refused to listen to any arguments or suggestions on the subject; but it remained to be seen whether he would be able to resist the remonstrances and entreaties which awaited him in his approaching interview with Mr. Seymour—warmly seconded, as they must of necessity be, by the certainty of securing the hand of Rosalie Granville.

Three months elapsed ere Herbert received further intelligence regarding his young friend's movements—*ergo*, he inferred that he had at length been prevailed upon to yield to his father's earnest solicitations, and was now established at Mertonsville, as heir-presumptive to the property!

Judge, therefore, of his surprise when a letter was put into his hand one morning, bearing a foreign postmark, the contents of

which informed him that Charles had firmly declined Mr. Seymour's offer, preferring rather to depend upon his own resources and exertions than accept a position rightfully belonging to another.

His lengthy and affectionate communication was perused by Herbert with the deepest interest. It breathed throughout a spirit of renewed hope, such as showed that the natural cheerfulness and elasticity of his disposition was beginning again to exercise its accustomed power over him, assisting him to regain a portion of his former light-hearted gaiety, and forget the stern sorrows of the past in his eager dreams of future prosperity.

The situation he at present held afforded him ample scope for his energies, without being too burdensome, or involving too onerous a weight of responsibility; and by dint of throwing himself with enthusiasm into his new duties, he succeeded in discharging them well, and regaining that peace of mind which appeared for a time to have deserted his breast.

Herbert, meanwhile, had not been idle. Quietly and unostentatiously he performed his multifarious engagements on behalf of those around him, and in many a cottage home his influence could be both seen and felt.

In returning Mr. Snapson's call, he merely made a general inquiry after the health of the family; and, giving the servant a card, was about to withdraw, without asking to see his master, when he suddenly felt his hand seized by Albert, who drew him *bon grè, mal grè*, into a sumptuously decorated apartment, where the lady of the house was seated in company with a visitor and her son and daughter.

She received him most graciously, gently reproached him for his meditated escape from her grateful acknowledgments, and presented him in due form to Henry and Arabella.

Mr. Snapson joined them almost immediately, and a desultory conversation followed.

When Herbert was taking leave, Albert suggested that himself and Henry should accompany him through the park; and while they were getting their hats, Mr. Snapson civilly presented him with a key which opened all the gates on his estate, and expressed a hope that he would walk in his grounds whenever he felt disposed.

Herbert thanked him, and then set off with his two companions.

He found Henry at first very silent and reserved; but by the time they reached the cottage, this had greatly worn away, and he appeared what he really was, an intelligent and well-informed young man.

"Albert has conceived a violent liking for you," he said, smiling, as the lad (regardless of the intimation he had just given him, that they should be returning home) sprang through the gate leading into Herbert's garden, and rushed to examine a curious little fountain—the result of James Gordon's ingenuity, which was sending up its tiny jet, in front of the study window.

"I should be delighted to think so," replied Herbert, with heartfelt sincerity, "for I never remember feeling so strongly interested in a boy of his age before; there is an indescribable something in his frank, off-hand manner and straightforward simplicity, which is to me very attractive."

"If you tell my father that," returned Henry, colouring, though

he tried to assume a careless and unconcerned tone, "he will proclaim you one of the most clever and clear-judging persons in existence."

"I am convinced that you are *yourself* deeply attached to him," observed Herbert, with a gentle significance, paying no heed to the sarcasm, which was obviously intended for Mr. Snapson—not Albert.

"Excuse me if I remind you," rejoined the other, half-jestingly, half-seriously, "that as this is the first time you have seen us together, your opportunities of judging have been somewhat limited."

"Most true," said Herbert, with one of his peculiarly winning smiles; "still, if the principle holds good, that love rarely fails to win affection in return, my conclusion, though hastily formed, is not an incorrect one."

"Oh, I understand," exclaimed Henry, a look of gratified consciousness softening his features: "you have discovered from Albert's prattle that he does not regard me with indifference. Dear little fellow," he murmured, softly, "I am often amazed at the strength and constancy of his affection."

"Why amazed?" asked Herbert, pleasantly. "Surely it is very natural for brothers——"

"In general—yes," replied the young man, quickly; "but in this case it is almost a miracle. You little know what Albert has to contend against. From the drawing-room to the servants' hall he is an object of absorbing interest—I was going to say idolatrous worship, and the expression would scarcely be too strong—and yet, instead of becoming imperious and exacting, as ninety-nine boys out of a hundred would, in his strange position, he is just what you see him, perfectly simple-minded and affectionate, though, I dare say," he added, laughing at his own warmth, "to you his *brusque* manner, and the confidence and assurance of his bearing, savour rather of presumption."

"Will you not come in?" said Herbert, cordially, as Albert at that instant rejoined them.

"Is the melancholy gentleman still with you?" demanded the lad, glancing archly towards his brother.

"No," replied Herbert, considerably amused at the idea of his friend receiving such an unsuitable appellation; "but although I cannot promise you the pleasure of seeing him——"

"Oh, it would be no particular pleasure," remarked the lad, quite gravely. "I only thought I should like to look at him and Henry together, as they are so much alike."

"You are too personal, Albert," remarked his brother, in a tone of gentle reproof.

"Am I? Well, I like to be personal; it is far better to say what you mean. Don't you think so?" turning to Herbert.

"Certainly—provided our plain-speaking does not injure any one."

"Injure! how could it?"

"Their feelings, for instance—some persons are, you know, remarkably sensitive."

The lad appeared thoughtful for a minute or two; but on Herbert opening the door, preparatory to conducting them upstairs, he laid his hand on his arm, and eagerly inquired,—

"If we come in for a short time, will you play to us?"

"What makes you suppose me capable of gratifying you in this respect?" asked Herbert, in evident surprise.

"Because once, when I was riding on my pony in the park, I heard the most beautiful music, though I could not tell where it came from."

"And are you wiser now?"

"Yes; I saw an organ in your drawing-room when I called here with papa, and then I knew that it must have been you who were playing."

"Very conclusive evidence, truly," laughingly responded Herbert; "may I not possess an organ without having the power of performing on it?"

The lad shook his head, and Henry observed,—

"Albert is excessively fond of music."

"But unfortunately I cannot play," said he dolefully; "I had a music master for a while, but papa sent him away, declaring that he made me look pale."

"What—the music master?" exclaimed Herbert, inquiringly.

"Yes; papa would have it that he was cross—I wish *you* could teach me," cried the impulsive boy, with a sudden energy, as he put his hand confidingly into one of Herbert's.

"Perhaps I should make you look pale, too," returned the latter; and while gazing anxiously and attentively into his intelligent face it all at once occurred to him that, notwithstanding the brilliant colour which gave him the appearance of perfect health, and the animation that lighted up every feature, and danced and sparkled in his large blue eyes, there was a certain expression of delicacy about him sufficiently apparent to occasion alarm.

On coming downstairs half an hour later Albert glanced into Herbert's study, the door of which stood invitingly open; and then, turning suddenly round, he remarked approvingly,—

"I should like to live here, Mr. Seymour; everything is so snug and comfortable."

"It certainly presents a contrast to your own house," quietly rejoined Herbert, "though you might not probably be quite so well satisfied with the comparatively poor accommodation as you imagine."

"Is Mertonsville Park anything like ours?" inquired Albert, quite unconscious that the question could occasion the least embarrassment.

Herbert started; grew fearfully pale; and with a quick gasp, between a sigh and a sob, he laid hold of one of the oaken pegs of a massive hat-stand beside which he stood.

"I saw it on your card," continued the lad, in an explanatory tone.

And Herbert then remembered having taken with him a gold enamelled case of visiting cards, and leaving one at Mr. Snapson's, without knowing that it and a few of the others still contained his former address.

Before Albert could ascertain the cause of his agitation, Herbert had recovered his usual self-possession; and with a quiet smile and hearty shake of the hand they parted.

"He did not answer my question," observed Albert to his brother, as they retraced their steps through the park; "and, strange to say, I never thought of repeating it."

"I should advise you to avoid the subject for the future, unless you wish to annoy Mr. Seymour," said Henry; "there is evidently some mystery connected with his past history."

"A mystery!" wonderingly echoed the lad.

"You must have seen how pale and agitated he became when you spoke of Mertonsville Park."

"Well—but——"

"I should scarcely have noticed it so much, only I happened to hear papa say that with all his questioning he could not get him to mention any particulars regarding his family, or in what part of the country they reside."

"Ah, I recollect," said Albert, thoughtfully; "he is a fine fellow,—eh! Henry?"

"Who—Mr. Seymour?"

"Of course" (rather impatiently).

Henry smiled.

"Yes, I think I shall like him."

"Think!" retorted Albert, firing up; "what a cold and cautious individual you are!"

"All the better for myself!" he answered, carelessly shrugging his shoulders.

"How? I can't understand that," commenced Albert; but he stopped short, on perceiving Mr. Snapson coming swiftly towards them.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE CARPENTER'S SHED.

"Steadily, steadily,
Press on, my soul;
Onward, and upward,
Straight to the goal!
Jesus!—He liveth—
Liveth for aye:
Steadily, steadily,
Urge on thy way." ANON.

"Bonne renommée vaut mieux que ceinture dorée."

FROM this time, Albert Snapson's visits to the cottage were of constant recurrence, and Herbert grew at length so accustomed to them, that he was quite astonished and perplexed if a day passed by without his having seen anything of him; and would watch for his appearance with a degree of interest which he sought neither to suppress nor disguise.

Albert was often accompanied by Henry; but with the other members of the Snapson family Herbert held little intercourse, as he made a point of civilly declining the various invitations he received to their gay parties; inclination and duty alike disposing him to shrink from unnecessarily close intimacy with those whose tastes and practices and principles were so totally opposed to his own.

Mrs. Snapson was first amazed, then piqued, at his neglecting to avail himself of her proffered hospitality, though the gentleness and cordiality of his manner towards herself, whenever she happened to meet him, and the decided pleasure he manifested in the society of her sons, prevented her from resenting his (in her opinion) unaccountable conduct to the same extent as she would otherwise have done.

It seemed, indeed, that the very fact of there being obstacles in the way rendered her less willing to succumb; for, instead of relinquishing the attempt, she became the more earnest in her endeavour to overcome her objections, and persuade him to accede to her wishes.

Accordingly, she waylaid him one morning, when he chanced to be walking through their grounds with Albert (who had begged him to look at a pretty pony equipage which Mr. Snapson had lately purchased for his sole use, and after playfully chiding him for refusing her repeated invitations, etc., she pressed him so warmly to waive ceremony, and dine with them that evening, *en famille*, that he at length consented to her proposal.

There was a little gleam of triumph in the lady's eye as she sat at the head of her well-appointed table, loaded with costly plate and glittering crystal, and saw Herbert on her right hand, bearing testimony to her superior skill in diplomacy, and Mr. Snapson looking gratified, but hardly able to conceal his surprise, at the unexpected addition to the family circle.

She spared no pains to render the evening an agreeable one to her guest; and when he left them, he was strongly urged to repeat his visit.

The more Mrs. Snapson saw of him, the more she professed to be delighted with his manner and conversation; but she still remained in ignorance of much which she felt curious to know regarding him; not all her delicate insinuations, or skilfully contrived questions, elicited any satisfactory information as to his reason for choosing Herbert Cottage, in perference to Mertonsville Park, as his place of residence.

For a while, she puzzled her brain to discover what he could possibly find to occupy his time. Gradually, however, her eyes were opened to the nature of some of his employments.

It was growing dusk one afternoon, when Henry and his brother, on returning from a long ride, drew up their horses near the stables. and, giving them in charge of a groom, proceeded on foot to the house,

Before they advanced more than a few steps, they were overtaken by the coachman (now quite recovered from his accident), who, respect fully touching his hat, inquired whether the ladies would be requiring the carriage.

"I haven't the least idea," said Henry; "but we can ask, and let you know."

"There is no use in asking," exclaimed Albert, confidently. "I heard mamma say, at dinner, that she intended to remain at home this evening."

"Thank you, sir," replied the coachman, apparently relieved; "I should not have troubled you, only I thought I would go and hear Mr. Seymour preach, unless my mistress——"

"What is that you say?" cried Albert, excitedly; "Mr. *who* preach?"

"Mr. Seymour, sir; I fancied you knew."

"Fancied I knew what?" demanded the lad, impatiently, opening his light-blue eyes to their fullest extent. "Do speak out, Grainger."

"Well, sir, I quite considered that, as you are so intimate with the gentleman, you must be aware that he preaches twice a week at Colton, and holds constant cottage meetings at the other villages, besides numerous Bible classes, temperance classes, and various kinds, of which I know nothing."

"Henry! do you hear this?" asked Albert, wondering incredulity depicted upon his speaking countenance.

Henry nodded assent, but made no verbal answer.

"Have you heard him yourself?" questioned the boy, turning again to Grainger.

"No, sir; but you may be sure what I say is true, for I am acquainted with many who regularly attend his meetings."

"Why, there is no church at Colton," returned Albert, musingly.

"At present he preaches in a large carpenter's shed."

"A shed!" repeated Albert, too bewildered even to smile.

"A shed!" echoed Henry, whistling softly.

"Did you ever know of any one preaching in such a place?" continued Albert, with the utmost seriousness.

Henry shrugged his shoulders—a very frequent custom of his.

"Is Mr. Seymour a clergyman then?" was Albert's next inquiry.

"I couldn't exactly say, sir, whether he would call himself one," rejoined Grainger, rubbing his chin reflectively; "I rather think *not*. Anyhow," he added briskly, "my wife declares that he does far more good than the generality of clergymen—and gets no remuneration for it either."

Henry laughed at the man's half-muttered aside; but Albert remained silent for a short time, evidently revolving the words in his mind. Presently he remarked abruptly,—

"And so he is to preach at Colton this very evening?"

The coachman assented.

"Well, Grainger"—with rather a patronising nod—"I am glad you told us. The best thing we can do is to go and hear him for ourselves don't you think so, Henry?"

Henry started perceptibly: "I fear——" he said dubiously.

"I assure you there is nothing to be afraid of," hastily interjected the boy.

"When does the service begin, Grainger?"

"At half-past seven, sir, but——"

"Then we need not detain you longer: perhaps you will tell Webster to bring up our horses at the proper time;" and with an air of dignity he was moving away, when Grainger said,—

"If I might be so bold, sir, I would advise you to be there at least half an hour earlier."

"What for?" laughed Albert.

"Because the shed is always crammed, and every seat occupied, long before the commencement of the service."

"Oh, in that case, we must make haste," rejoined Albert, drawing out an elegant little watch. "Come along, Henry, let us run and tell mamma where we are going."

Henry went through the form of offering a few objections to the plan, but he knew that it would be of little use, as his brother seemed bent on carrying it into execution, and was scarcley able to restrain his impatience while listening to him.

On reaching the house, Albert burst into the drawing-room, flushed and out of breath.

Mrs. Snapson—who was seated at her writing-table, assisting Arabella to fill up some invitation cards which lay before them—looked up, and asked, with a smile,—

"Is anything the matter, my love?"

"No, mamma; but don't wait tea for Henry and me: we are going to Colton, to hear Mr. Seymour preach in a carpenter's shed, and may not be home until late."

The pen dropped from the lady's hand; and at the same instant Mr. Snapson laid down the newspaper he had been reading, and gazed around him in blank bewilderment.

"Pray explain yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Snapson, recovering her equability.

"Explain myself, mamma?" in excessive surprise; "why, there is nothing to explain; I have told you where we are going, and for what purpose, and that is all I know."

"But, Albert, are you really serious?" asked Arabella, gazing keenly at him; "do you mean to say that Mr. Seymour *preaches*—and in a shed, too? It's impossible!"

"We shall soon see about that," replied Albert, laughing. "Good-bye, papa," he cried, as he passed Mr. Snapson's chair; "I can't wait, because Grainger says, unless we set out early, we shall find every seat occupied; and, on the whole, I perfer sitting to standing!"

Thus saying, he made his exit in the same boisterous fashion as he had entered, and went immediately in search of Henry, who, dread-

ing a scene, and being by no means anxious to have the vials of Mr. Snapson's wrath poured upon himself, had prudently forborne to accompany Albert to his step-father's presence.

"There is something positively ridiculous in that boy's infatuation regarding Mr. Seymour," observed the gentleman, peevishly, directly the door closed upon his young heir.

"*This* is certainly a most extraordinary crotchet," answered his wife, adroitly; "still, one scarcely likes thwarting him, in his delicate state of health."

"Thwarting him!" exclaimed Mr. Snapson, hastily. "Of course not—he only requires management, and that of the gentlest kind."

"Very true, my dear," was the quiet response; and the lady once more took up her pen, and bent over her writing.

"I think it very probable," continued Mr. Snapson, angrily (rising suddenly from his seat, and beginning to perambulate the apartment), "I think it *very* probable that Henry is at the bottom of it——"

"Always Henry!" mumbled Arabella, in an exceedingly discontented tone.

"Did you speak?" sternly inquired her step-father.

"She had no intention of disturbing you," remarked Mrs. Snapson, excusingly—darting, nevertheless, a reproachful glance at the rashly disposed girl; "it is only an address I wish her to copy, which she finds some difficulty in deciphering."

Arabella turned her head aside, lest the scorn she could not help feeling should be expressed in her countenance; and Mr. Snapson, apparently satisfied with the alleged reason for the interruption pursued, in a voice that spoke of annoyance and chagrin,—

"It is most unfortunate that the foolish lad should be so easily induced to agree to whatever absurd scheme Henry may suggest; I have noticed it in a thousand instances, and have often warned Albert against it."

The colour rushed over Arabella's cheek, and her eyes flashed fire. Indignant words, too, were on the point of bursting from her lips; but no sooner did Mrs. Snapson's observant eye detect indications of the coming storm, than with her usual shrewdness and tact she hastened to avert the consequences by leaning across the table, and exclaiming with great suavity, though the look she fastened on her was anything but indulgent,—

"I want you to take these to Thornton, my love," putting a bundle of notes into her hand; "tell him to see that they are sent to their proper addresses without delay. And when you have done this," she continued, as the young lady rose (in no very amiable mood) to obey her, "perhaps you will pay a visit to the nursery; I shall join you there presently, as I am beginning to feel uneasy about Beatrice."

"Arabella seems to be growing more and more irritable," was Mr. Snapson's first complimentary observation after her departure.

He took it for granted that her dissatisfaction entirely arose from a disinclination to carry out her mother's wishes, or he might probably have expressed himself in stronger language.

"Just now she is rather nervous," replied his wife, quickly.

"Nervous!" with an ironical smile.

"Dear little Beatrice is not quite well to-day," she explained, ignoring his implied doubt of the accuracy of her opinion; "and

Arabella being, as you must have noticed, dotingly fond of her, cannot divest herself of the idea that she is going to be seriously ill."

"Indeed," returned her husband, coldly; "I should never have given Arabella credit for any such feeling."

Seeing that he appeared in a determined humour for finding fault, Mrs. Snapson took no further pains to conciliate him for a while; but on hearing him recommence a series of complaints against Henry's defects and misdeeds, she suddenly closed the book she had been attempting to read, and, leaning back in her chair, said, slowly and decidedly,—

"It strikes me, my dear, that you are in the habit,—quite unintentionally, of course,—of strangely misjudging Henry's character."

"How so?" exclaimed the gentleman, angrily, knitting his brows.

"You forget the numerous admirable traits in his disposition—his quietness and amiability—the little trouble he has ever given you; and, I may add, the very moderate amount you are obliged to expend on him."

"He has all he requires, and more!" muttered Mr. Snapson.

"Yes, because he is happily blessed with a contented spirit: but if you will compare him to some young men whom I could mention,—look at my relatives, for instance; the sons of Lord L——."

"*Their* position is a very different one from Henry's."

"True," rejoined the lady; "their father is not half as wealthy as yourself."

"Pshaw! I did not mean that," said Mr. Snapson, in a less harsh tone; he rather liked this comparison.

"Then, again, as regards Henry's love for Albert; you surely would not wish it otherwise!" insinuated his wife, who was quick in following up the advantage she had gained. "How different it *might* have been!" she added pathetically; "he might have felt jealous of Albert's expectations and possessions, and hated him (or at least disliked him) for being so much better off than himself; as it is, he would, I believe, lay down his life for him!"

"Well, well, I don't deny that he may be fond of the lad," remarked Mr. Snapson, greatly pacified. What annoys me is——"

But Mrs. Snapson, having no desire to listen to a recapitulation of the young man's offences, all at once bethought herself of the promise she had made Arabella, and, with a half-uttered word of apology, she left him to his own reflections.

CHAPTER L.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

"Much as we prize the active worth
Of those who, day by day,
Tread with us on this toilsome earth
Its devious thorny way;
A charm more hallowed and profound,
By purer feelings fed,
Imagination casts around
The memory of the dead." BARTON.

"IT is a good thing we happened to take Grainger's advice," remarked Albert Snapson to his brother, as they found, on arriving at the before-mentioned shed, that it was already nearly full.

"Yes," replied Henry, glancing around him, in rather an undecided and dubious fashion. "It is a queer place; I don't know what to make of it."

Albert laughed very unconcernedly at his perplexity; and, constituting himself guide, he succeeded without any difficulty in piloting him through the crowd, assembled near the door of the unpretending edifice.

About half-way up they were brought to a standstill; but a man having recognised them, and whispered Albert's name to some of the others, several seats were promptly vacated and respectfully offered for their use. I am bound to confess, however, that in spite of this act of courtesy on the part of their humble friends, Henry accepted it with a very bad grace, and took the place assigned to himself, close beside a burly personage—ycleped Joe Taylor, the blacksmith—feeling most completely out of his element. The comical look of dismay he cast on Albert proved so temptingly provocative of mirth, that he lad's risibility was strongly excited: and the thing that enabled him to maintain his gravity was seeing the general air of solemn expectancy which seemed to pervade that silent company. Their quiet, earnest faces impressed him deeply: and he awaited Herbert's appearance with intense curiosity.

At last a slight stir near the door announced his arrival, and, amidst breathless silence, he slowly walked to the upper end of the shed, where he at once began the service.

Henry listened abstractedly to the reading of the first hymn; but when the singing commenced, he roused himself just sufficiently to decline receiving the hymn-book which the worthy blacksmith was offering him, and then relapsed into a state of apparent self-forgetfulness.

Albert scarcely removed his eyes from Herbert's face during the whole service. His ardent, impressible nature made him peculiarly susceptible to every kind of influence; and the eagerness and excitability with which he had habituated himself, boy though he was, to become interested in any theme which appeared worthy of his

attention, without the slightest reference to the wishes or opinions of others, inclined him in this instance to yield a willing and unprejudiced hearing to truths which, though not new to him, were presented in a different light from what he had been accustomed to. The clergyman, whose church Mr. Snapson attended, uniformly addressed himself to the understanding; whereas Herbert sought rather to convince the *heart* than the *intellect*: and though he cared not to excel in polished diction, or rhetorical display, or the subtle intricacies of philosophical reasoning, his thorough earnestness, and undying zeal and devotedness of spirit, rendered his appeals both eloquent and convictive.

"I should like to wait and speak to him," whispered Albert to his brother, at the conclusion of the service.

"Nonsense," replied Henry, more hastily than was his wont; "don't you see that he is engaged? Besides," (slightly hesitating,) "he would probably be embarrassed were he to find us here."

"Not a bit of it!" rejoined the lad, stoutly; "he was looking at us just now, and appeared quite delighted. However, if you really wish to go," he added, observing how disappointed Henry seemed.

"I *do* wish it!" exclaimed the young man, quickly. "I am perfectly tired of this insufferably hot place."

"Come along, then," returned Albert, good-naturedly; and, without another word, they mingled with the crowd. Outside the door, they found a groom waiting for them with their horses; and having vaulted into the saddle, they soon left the peaceful village of Colton behind them.

"*Now* what do you think of him, Henry?" cried Albert, victoriously, as they reined in their horses near one of the park gates; "is he not a noble fellow?"

"I dare say," answered his brother, in a tone of indifference.

"Why, I fancied you would be in raptures with him," said Albert, apparently surprised at his coldness. "Such a sermon as that was!" he soliloquised.

"Yes; I can't deny that he preaches remarkably well," replied Henry, making an effort to shake off his moodiness. "Still, I confess I prefer Mr. Skilton's sermons."

"Do you? for *my* part, I never understand a word of them; now, Mr. Seymour is so plain."

"Rather too plain!" muttered Henry, discontentedly. "I felt quite uncomfortable during the whole of the sermon."

Thus saying, he put spurs to his horse, and did not speak again until they alighted at the hall door.

A day or two after this, as Herbert was passing through one of the principal streets of Lanchester, attended by James Gordon, his attention was suddenly attracted by a group of young men who were loitering on the pavement in front of a fashionable hotel, looking very much as if they did not know what to do with themselves.

He might have passed by without taking any particular notice of them, but something in the appearance of the foremost of the party, whose face was only partially turned towards him, seemed to be familiar. His voice, too, strangely reminded him of old times; and it was with a sensation of the keenest interest that Herbert tried to obtain a nearer view of his countenance.

His wish was soon granted; for just as he came within three

paces of the party, the gentleman he had been observing wheeled swiftly round, and Herbert instantly recognised him.

It was his cousin, Reginald Grafton!

A slight start on the one side, and significant elevation of the hands and eyes on the other, revealed their mutual surprise at this unexpected *rencontre.*

Herbert was the first to regain his composure. He smiled, and held out his hand; but Reginald almost unconsciously drew back, stammered a few unintelligible words, and, confused, embarrassed, and half ashamed, he gazed around him for some way of escape, when his eye inadvertently falling upon his companions—who were evidently amusing themselves at his expense—he changed his tactics by exchanging a whispered sentence with the gentleman who stood nearest himself; and then, returning to Herbert, exclaimed in a tone of real or feigned cordiality,—

"Is it really yourself, old fellow, or your ghost?"

"Have you any doubt on the subject?" replied Herbert, quietly.

"Certes, can you ask the question?" said Reginald, with a covert sneer. "It is ages since I heard of you; and therefore I concluded that, finding your worth so little appreciated in this world, you had set out in search of another."

"You do not believe, then, that 'one who meriteth esteem,' whatever his worldly circumstances may be, 'need never lack a friend,' *even in this world,*" returned Herbert, meaningly.

"By the bye, how do you manage to live?" questioned Reginald, in a *brusque* tone, keenly surveying our hero from head to foot.

"I presume you mean *where,*" said Herbert, calmly, though his eyes dilated, and his upper lip trembled visibly.

"Oh, it's all the same," he answered, colouring; "I thought—— But no matter! inordinate curiosity is not one of my failings."

"Your stay in Lanchester will doubtless be a short one," remarked Herbert, glancing at Reginald's companions, who had mounted the broad flight of steps leading into the hotel, and now stood on the threshold, impatiently waiting for him to rejoin them.

"Yes, I hope we may be able to continue our journey to-morrow. But for an accident which happened to my carriage, we should not have been here at all."

"My carriage!" reflected Herbert, and, on regarding him more attentively, he observed that there was a band of crape around his hat.

With a vague perception of uneasiness, he inquired for General Clare.

Reginald gazed at him in utter amazement.

"Surely you must ere this have heard of my poor grandfather's death," he said, mournfully shaking his head.

"Dead!" cried Herbert, shocked and agitated; "I can scarcely believe you, Reginald."

"Alas! it is only too true," replied his cousin; "he died about three months ago, after a very short illness. I feel as if I should never recover from the effects of so terrible a loss;" and he placed his little finger to the corner of his eye, as if to dry a starting tear.

Herbert did not see the tear; but he was touched by his change of tone, and respected his grief, never for a moment doubting that it was genuine.

"Are you still residing at B——?" he asked, softly.

"Yes—no—that is, I can hardly say," answered Reginald, in great confusion.

"Well, I will not try to force myself into your confidence," said Herbert, with a grave, sad smile; "I pray that you may be able to——"

"Come—no preaching!" angrily interrupted his cousin; "I can't endure that sort of thing."

"Good-bye, then; there is nothing I can do for you, I suppose?"

"I don't know about that," exclaimed Reginald, bluntly; "I rather think you ought to invite me to call on you, if—as I suspect is the case—you are living in this neighbourhood."

"My humble dwelling has no attractions to offer you," said Herbert, gently; "but if you would really like to spend an hour or two with me this evening—and can leave your companions for that time—I shall be happy to see you. Here is my address," putting a card into his hand.

"All right!" responded Reginald, coolly transferring it to his waistcoat pocket; "may I come and share your frugal dinner?"

"Certainly; only be prepared for a frugal one—and be sure and come *alone*."

"It will be a change," muttered his cousin, taking a cigar from his case, and proceeding to light it; "I was just wondering how we should be able to spin out the remaining hours of the day. First of all, I shall call upon young Stanley, whom I have not seen for many months; and then——"

"Sir Edward Stanley is out of town," said Herbert, "and does not return until to-night. You may, however, meet him at my cottage, as he spoke of seeing me on his way home."

"Are you very intimate?" questioned Reginald, in surprise.

"Wait until you have an opportunity of judging for yourself," replied Herbert, moving away.

"Well, *au revoir*—I shall not fail to find you out this evening."

Herbert placed little dependence upon his promise, concluding that his companions would in all probability propose some other and more congenial entertainment *pour passer le temps*.

Not until he reached the end of the street did Herbert think of waiting for James Gordon, who voluntarily left him on perceiving that he had met with an acquaintance; and entering a shop close by, where he was in the habit of dealing, he began to make a few necessary purchases. When he returned to the hotel, he found that he was already gone; but Reginald Grafton and his companions were still lingering outside the door, loudly conversing together on what seemed—to judge by the peals of boisterous laughter which constantly burst from their lips—to be a most interesting and exciting subject.

A few disjointed sentences fell on his ear as he passed them; and for a second or two he stood quite motionless, viewing them in palpable amazement, a contemptuous smile curling his lip, and a sudden look of determination deepening the colour on his swart countenance.

"Ha, ha," he monologised, rapidly pursuing his way; "they expect to take us unawares, it seems, and are picturing to themselves Mr. Herbert's dismay when he is called upon to receive so many uninvited guests without having the means of giving them a suitable

entertainment. Well, we shall see; perhaps they may have less cause for mirth than they imagine!"

"Why, Gordon, whither are you posting at this prodigious rate?" exclaimed Herbert, whom he nearly ran against.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," he said, slackening his pace; "I wanted to overtake you before you reached the Hall. Do you suppose the meeting will have commenced?"

"Scarcely," said Herbert, mechanically consulting his watch; "you know we set out early."

"I am afraid you are tiring yourself, sir," observed Gordon, anxiously, as he noticed that there was a peculiar look of depression upon his face. "This long walk is too much for you."

"I was thinking of my poor uncle," returned Herbert, smiling sadly; "his death must have been very sudden."

"Which uncle, sir?" inquired Gordon.

"Did I forget to tell you?—General Clare! His grandson, Reginald Grafton (with whom I spoke just now), mentioned it as a matter of course, never dreaming that I was ignorant even of his illness. If I could be sure," he continued, in a musing tone, "that he was prepared for the stupendous change, I should feel comparatively happy; and yet I am not altogether without hope, for *his* character and Reginald's were totally dissimilar, and during the last conversation we held together, he made many admissions which at the time struck me as evincing no little interest in the things pertaining to the kingdom of our Lord. I ought to tell you, James," he added, abruptly, "that I have invited my cousin to dine with me this evening, not that I really expect him, as his companions will probably urge him to remain with them; but I thought it well to give him the option. I hope this may not be inconvenient to you, my friend."

"Oh, no, sir," answered Gordon, promptly; and with this the subject was dropped.

Five minutes more brought them to the door of the building, where a celebrated missionary traveller was going to give some interesting particulars regarding his labours in Africa.

There Gordon paused, saying he had several trifling business arrangements to make, and would therefore prefer returning to the cottage.

Seeing him in earnest, and there being no time to offer opposition, Herbert suffered him to depart, though he certainly wondered greatly at his strange determination.

CHAPTER LI.

HOW HERBERT'S UNINVITED GUESTS WERE ENTERTAINED.

"But, oh! mankind are unco' weak,
And little to be trusted;
If self the wavering balance shake,
It's rarely right adjusted." BURNS.

"'Tis conscience doth make cowards of us all."

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we will." SHAKESPEARE.

IT only wanted about half an hour to dinner, when Herbert reached home that evening, as he had gone some miles out of his way for the purpose of calling on an aged couple whom he had been earnestly requested to visit, and whose necessities, both temporal and spiritual, he found even greater than was represented.

His thoughts were so occupied with what he had been seeing and hearing that he scarcely remembered his expected visitor; and it was with considerable astonishment he detected unmistakable signs of bustle pervading the usually orderly household.

He was walking straight to the dining-room, when James Gordon placed himself before the door, as if to prevent his entering—not, however, until he had obtained a glimpse of the table spread with abundance of plate, and apparently laid for eight at the very least. He also saw two respectable and well-dressed men-servants, one engaged at the sideboard, and the other arranging a bouquet of pink and white camelias in an elegant epergne, which occupied the centre of the table.

"My dear James!" he exclaimed, viewing his faithful and indefatigable adherent in utter bewilderment, "what extraordinary fancy is this?"

"If you will let me follow you to your dressing-room for a minute," said Gordon, in a low tone, "I will explain everything."

"Come, then; for I confess I am completely stupefied," replied Herbert, turning away.

When they approached the drawing-room door, he was about to turn the handle, but a sudden movement of Gordon's arrested him; and, with a slight smile, he passed on to his own apartment.

"Now, James, take pity on me, and unravel this mystery," he observed, throwing himself down on a seat; "why are all these preparations going on below? and why did you wish to prevent me from going into the drawing-room?"

"The fact is," answered Gordon, who was industriously bringing forward such articles of apparel as he wished our hero to appear in, "Sir Edward Stanley and a friend of his, who has returned with him from M——, are there, and when I said that you——"

"Sir Edward here!" cried Herbert, starting up; "why, then, should I not go to him?"

"Wait a moment, sir," said Gordon, eagerly opening his dressing-case: "please get ready first, and then I will tell you why I am in so great a hurry."

"Indeed, your conduct needs explanation," replied Herbert, good-naturedly receiving a coat, which Gordon seemed anxious for him to wear; "I never knew you care about such things before."

"Now these, sir,"—handing him a pair of dress-boots, in lieu of the ones in which he had been walking. "I certainly ought to apologise for treating you so unceremoniously; but I know you can trust me."

"Trust you, my friend!" replied Herbert, turning quickly round, and giving his hand a fervent grasp, "aye, that I do!"

"And if I should have acted contrary to what you would have advised," remarked Gordon—a smile of complacency lighting up his face, on observing that Herbert's toilet was nearly completed—"you will excuse it?"

"Of course, of course," answered Herbert pleasantly; "you surely do not suppose that I am vain-glorious enough to consider my own way the best."

And then Gordon, knowing that the other guests would be arriving very soon, hurriedly told him how he had undesignedly overheard sufficient of Reginald Grafton's conversation with his friends to show him that, although he had allowed Herbert to understand he should visit him alone, it was all the time his intention to bring his companions with him, solely for the purpose of enabling them to enjoy his discomfiture, and make themselves acquainted with the imperfections or deficiences which might haply be discoverable in the ordering and conducting of his *menage*, prefatory to turning them into ridicule; and how he had taken measures to deprive them of their anticipated diversion by being prepared to receive them in a very different manner from what they expected.

"But the expense, James?" observed Herbert, thoughtfully; "have you made any calculation?"

"Quite a trifle," briskly responded Gordon.

"Are you sure we can meet it without encroaching upon the fund laid aside for supplying some of the wants of our poorer brethren?"

"Oh, dear, yes, sir; I would not think of asking you to touch that."

Then seeing that Herbert still looked somewhat uncertain, he added, with a smile—

"You know, sir, I am not, on the whole, a bad manager."

"So it appears," said Herbert, reflectingly. "I often ask myself how you can possibly contrive so well with so little. You never seem to be at a loss for means, and yet I know by the smallness of the sums you receive it must at times be no easy matter to keep up the semblance of respectability."

"Ah, sir, forgive me for saying so; but you are not a competent judge in these pecuniary matters," answered Gordon, who always began to feel uneasy when Herbert spoke thus. "But about Sir Edward," he went on, wishing to change the subject. "Knowing how thoroughly you can depend upon him, and not being quite sure as to the time you would be here, after telling him how we are situated, I begged him to remain and assist you this evening, which he instantly agreed to do."

"His presence will be a great advantage," said Herbert, smiling quietly; "and now that I have obeyed your behest, my good James, I suppose I may consider myself at liberty to join him?"

"Yes, you are all right now, sir;" and Gordon accompanied his words with a glance of admiring satisfaction. "It will be odd indeed," he murmured below his breath, "if they are able to detect a fault in *him*,—and for the rest, we shall see."

A grim smile stole to his lips, as at that moment an impatient pull was made at the door-bell, and, with his stateliest air, he immediately opened it himself. Not a muscle of his countenance moved, as his eye rested on the six young men who were congregated outside, waiting for admission, and on the showy carriage which was slowly moving from the gate.

Apparently the sight of him, attired in plain black cloth, and also of one of the other men, who stood in the hall, perplexed and amazed Reginald Grafton and his friends; for they exchanged looks of excessive surprise, and one or two of the least assuming among them stepped back as if reluctant to enter.

"Does Mr. Seymour live here?" roughly demanded Reginald, viewing Gordon with a haughty stare.

"Yes, sir," he answered, his features undergoing no shadow of change: "will you not walk in?"

"Come along," cried Reginald, looking back; "what are you all standing there for?"

"Really, Grafton," said one, touching his arm, and speaking in a suppressed voice, "this is all so contrary to what you led us to expect, that I hardly like intruding."

"Intruding! stuff and nonsense!" ejaculated Reginald, with a hoarse laugh. "It can't be helped now," he added more softly; "we must put a good face upon it."

Thus saying, he pressed forward, followed by the others.

"I hope we shall not be disturbing Mr. Seymour?" observed the last of the group, civilly addressing Gordon.

"Oh, no, sir," he answered, purposely raising his voice; "my master expects Mr. Grafton, I believe."

"Is he alone?" inquired Reginald (who was half-way up the stairs), glancing over his shoulder.

"Sir Edward Stanley and Major Ramsay are with him at present."

"Major Ramsay!" echoed Reginald, starting back, to the imminent danger of himself and those behind him. "What a nuisance! Who would have thought of meeting him here?" he muttered. "I feel strongly disposed to wait until he is gone. What say you, Cleveland?" appealing to his nearest neighbour.

"He is not the only major of that name," remarked his friend.

"I greatly fear, though, it will prove my old adversary," returned Reginald, discontentedly; "for I have some faint recollection of being told that he was distantly related to the Stanleys."

"Well, it is too late to talk of *that*," impatiently retorted Cleveland, as the man who had preceded them upstairs threw open the drawing-room door, and announced Mr. Grafton; "all you can do is to make the best of it."

And Reginald seemed to be of the same opinion; for he quickly resumed his old blustering manner; and, saluting Herbert with outstretched hands, and an *empressement* bordering on the ridiculous, he

proceeded to introduce his companions with the same coolness and *sang froid* as if it had been an understood thing that they should accompany him.

The sensation which he had hoped to make was, however, thanks to Gordon's penetrative foresight, entirely unverified; for Herbert received his unbidden guests with that easy courtesy which always distinguished him, and appeared neither disconcerted nor annoyed at their number.

"Perhaps he does not intend to offer us any refreshment," whispered Reginald to Cleveland; "if so, that will account for his marvellous indifference."

Aloud he said, "Well, Herbert, I promised you I would come and share your frugal dinner, and you see I have kept my word."

"I trust you may have no reason to regret it," calmly replied Herbert.

"I suppose, old fellow," continued Reginald, slapping him on the back, "these few friends of mine will be welcome, as well as myself?"

"Oh, certainly, if they can do me the favour of remaining," was Herbert's polite response.

"Isn't he cool, Cleveland?" exclaimed Reginald, in a low-breathed aside.

But Cleveland made no answer. He was beginning to feel excessively uncomfortable, and heartily wished he could in some way extricate himself from the questionable position he occupied.

While *he* was considering the propriety of apologising to Herbert for the irregularity of their conduct, Reginald's eyes were roving inquisitively around the room, and his face was unable to conceal the astonishment he felt at the superior and even elegant style of the furniture.

"*Parbleu!*" he cried, in a tone more significant than refined, while his gaze reverted to the owner of the apartment. "You have not managed badly for yourself after all, my worthy cousin! I assure you, I had no idea I should find you the possessor of such comfortable quarters."

"Allow me to introduce you to my friend and relative, Major Ramsay," said Sir Edward, coming to Herbert's assistance.

"I believe it will be unnecessary," observed the Major, bowing stiffly; "I had for several years the honour of being acquainted with Mr. Grafton."

A sudden flush dyed Reginald's cheek and brow, and he bit his lip furiously, but speedily recovering his wonted assurance, he held out his hand, crying in pretended surprise,—

"Why, Ramsay, this is an unlooked-for pleasure!"

"I am glad you think so!" dryly returned the major.

And Herbert could not avoid perceiving that he took no notice of Reginald's proffered hand.

"Ha! there is Mr. Vernon, too," pursued Major Ramsay, his piercing black eye singling out a short, thick-set young man, with a florid complexion and disagreeable-looking face, who was doing his best to elude observation. "How is your cousin, sir?"

"Thank you," stammered the gentleman addressed, growing fearfully pale; "I——"

He suddenly stopped, abashed by the bright penetrating gaze with which the Major continued to regard him.

"Perhaps you have spared yourself the trouble of inquiring after his welfare," sarcastically suggested Major Ramsay, turning haughtily away, and resuming his former seat near the window.

Mr. Vernon hung his head mortified and crestfallen, though his small, ferret-like eyes twinkled angrily underneath his projecting brows.

Herbert scarcely knew what to make of this little by-play, but it was sufficiently obvious that, so far as Reginald Grafton and his particular friend Mr. Vernon were concerned, their being thus unexpectedly brought into Major Ramsay's society was far from agreeable.

Sir Edward, too, seemed greatly puzzled and embarrassed, not having been aware that his relative had any previous knowledge of Reginald Grafton.

It was a decided relief to them all when at length the announcement that the dinner was served created a diversion.

But if Reginald's surprise at what he had already witnessed was great, how was it augmented, on descending to the dining-room, where everything had been prepared under James Gordon's careful supervision, and the dinner which awaited them such as could not fail to satisfy even the most fastidious.

"Positively, this passes my comprehension!" said Reginald to Cleveland, who sat at his right hand, Mr. Vernon occupying a seat on his left, while Major Ramsay, to their annoyance and dismay, placed himself directly opposite; "what *is* the meaning of it?"

"You ought to know best," replied Cleveland, pointing meaningly to the various articles of richly chased silver plate, which all bore Herbert's own initials.

"Can he have divined our intention, and made ready accordingly?" continued Reginald, musingly.

"Had you not better ask him?" said Cleveland; and, with an ironical smile, he bent his head over his plate.

"I will presently," muttered Reginald, glancing furtively across the table.

"A pretty mess we have got ourselves into, Grafton," remarked Mr. Vernon, in a sullen whisper; "I wish to goodness I had never agreed to join you in this mad freak. Why, he"—indicating by an expressive movement of the head, that it was Major Ramsay to whom he alluded —"is the last man in the kingdom I should have consented to meet!"

"How was I to know *he* would be here?" retorted Reginald, fiercely; "I have as much reason to detest him as yourself."

"Is it of me you are speaking?" coolly inquired the Major, whose hearing, like his sight, appeared to be remarkably acute; "because, if so, I beg to return you my unfeigned thanks—to be *detested* by such characters as Mr. Grafton and Mr. Vernon" (these words were added in a low tone, and evidently meant for the exclusive benefit of the two most concerned) "is, in my estimation, the highest compliment they could pay me!"

"Worsted again!" unwittingly murmured Mr. Vernon, abstractedly fixing his eyes upon the tablecloth; "really this is one of the most unfortunate evenings I have ever spent."

"It is well that you qualify your remark by inserting the little word *one*," said the Major, leaning forward, and contemplating him with

mingled pity and contempt; "otherwise it might have been my painful duty to refresh your memory."

"What do you mean, sir?" Mr. Vernon forced himself to ask, though the sudden leaden hue which his face assumed, and the fearful, guilty look he cast on his antagonist showed that he was by no means so ignorant as he wished to appear.

"Ask your conscience, sir! Unless quite callous, it will enlighten you," sternly responded the Major; and, to Mr. Vernon's infinite relief, he recommenced a conversation with the gentleman beside whom he sat.

CHAPTER LII.

AN EXPOSE.

"Still to guilt occasion sends
Slaves, tools, accomplices—no friends." BYRON.

"What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just;
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted."
SHAKESPEARE.

As soon as Major Ramsay's eye was off him, Mr. Vernon rallied from his discomfort, and made an effort to recover his wonted vivacity, though, previous to uttering any equivocal sentiment, or indulging in any of his offensive jokes, he involuntarily directed an exploratory glance at his formidable opponent, lest he should again incur his displeasure.

To all appearance, however, the Major had forgotten his presence; for he continued quietly to converse with first one and then another of the party, without troubling himself to observe the movements of his despised *vis-a-vis*.

But at length, emboldened by his silence and seeming forgetfulness, Reginald and his friend were encouraged to become more and more boisterous in their mirth and personal in their remarks.

"I say, Herbert," exclaimed the former, taking advantage of a general pause in the conversation, "Vernon and I are finding fault with you for spoiling our sport."

"Indeed," replied Herbert, very composedly; "I am not conscious of having done anything to merit your reproof."

"As I led you to suppose this morning that I should come here alone, we naturally reckoned on finding you unprepared for other visitors; and it would have been fine fun to witness——"

"Fun!" repeated Sir Edward, gravely; "I can hardly conceive of a more disagreeable position than that of going where we are uncertain as to the kind of reception we shall meet with."

"Oh, we had no fear on that score," laughed Reginald; "it was the *entertainment*, *not* the reception, of which we stood in doubt!"

A lightning glance shot from the Major's eye at the unpardonable rudeness of this remark; but it was unnoticed by Reginald, who continued, in a tone of mock seriousness,—

"Tell us how you managed, my good fellow."

"Really, your language is none of the clearest this evening," answered Herbert, trying to suppress an exclamation of impatience.

"Did your tutelary deity apprise you of our plan, and initiate you into——"

"Well, as you appear so interested in the matter," said Herbert, a peculiar smile skirting his lips, "I may mention that (incredible as it will probably seem to you), so far from seeking to be made acquainted

with your designs, I actually forgot your promise to dine with me until I came home, precisely half an hour before your arrival. If, therefore, you require any further information, I must refer you to some more competent authority."

This ought to have satisfied Reginald Grafton as to the propriety of abandoning the subject; but he was not easily silenced, and from one impertinent query he went on to another, until Sir Edward, who warmly resented the indignity offered to his friend, deliberately interrupted him in the middle of a sentence, by saying, pointedly, "It ill becomes *you*, Mr. Grafton, to pursue this question further."

"Why so?" bluntly returned the young man.

"Surely you cannot be utterly insensible to the excessive kindness—and, I may be pardoned for adding, totally undeserved forbearance—you have received from your cousin, since entering his house; though it would appear, by your conduct, that you no longer remember the immense debt of loving gratitude you owe him for the inestimable service which he rendered you, as well as myself, some years ago."

The intense gravity and firm decision with which these words were uttered overawed Reginald for the moment, and a look of shame and humiliation overspread his face, as Cleveland, touching him on the arm, asked in unfeigned amazement,—

"To what does he refer, Grafton?"

"Did you never hear that Mr. Grafton and I both owe our lives to his"—pointing to Herbert—"bravery?"

"No," said Mr. Cleveland, emphatically, and, almost without knowing what he did, he edged his chair a little way from Reginald. "Mean—ungrateful," he murmured, half aloud; "I could not have believed *that* of him!"

"My dear Edward," said Herbert, smiling at the young baronet, who sat at the bottom of the table, "you have not yet told me whether your visit to M—— proved a satisfactory one. Did you find the gentleman you were in search of?"

"Oh, yes; and more than that, I got him to accede to our wishes respecting the readmission of Craig into his office."

"I am glad, indeed, to hear you say so," replied Herbert, his eyes dilating with pleasure; "how delighted the poor man will be when you tell him the good news!"

"I shall leave that office to you, as it was entirely your own idea that I should apply to his old master."

"No, no," said Herbert, hastily, "I——"

"It is fortunate that I chose to-day instead of to-morrow for my journey," pursued Sir Edward, with an arch glance at the Major; "otherwise I should have missed seeing my friend Ramsay: for I am ashamed to say he had no intention of coming to Lanchester, and it was with difficulty I could persuade him to accompany me home."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Major, in a tone that made Mr. Vernon start; "when I inform Mr. Seymour of the painful circumstance which obliged me to spend a few days in M——, he will scarcely wonder at my wishing to leave the neighbourhood as quickly as possible, after accomplishing what I had in view."

Sir Edward regarded him in evident astonishment.

"I was not aware——" he said.

"Of my object in visiting M——," quickly interposed the Major. "No, I dare say not. But the fact is, I had been earnestly requested

by an old friend of ours, a widow lady, to take upon myself the melancholy office of getting her son placed in the asylum for lunatics —her only son," he added, looking around him, and speaking amid breathless silence; "a young man of good family, high character, and intellectual attainments; gentle and amiable; harmless, guileless, and unsuspecting, even to a fault.

"Poor fellow!" said Sir Edward, as he paused.

"Well you may pity him, Edward," continued Major Ramsay, in a deep, solemn voice. "He deserves the pity of every true-hearted man. There was no hereditary taint of insanity in his blood, no previous signs of weakness or excitability, to make the fearful catastrophe less overwhelming; and, for this reason, his mother, whose pride and idol he was, is at present suffering the most poignant anguish which it is perhaps possible for a human being to experience on this side the grave!"

"How, then, did it happen?" softly inquired Sir Edward.

"I will tell you," said the Major, in a voice of concentrated severity; "he was the dupe of two young men, somewhat older than himself, but about the same standing in society.

"These two had been for several years leading a wild and dissipated life, and, as a natural consequence, were greatly involved. Rather than suffer any personal inconvenience by way of liquidating their debts, they resolved on resorting to a base and dishonourable method of extricating themselves from their difficulties. Gradually they prevailed upon my ill-fated young friend to join them at the gaming-table, and, by permitting him, for a time, invariably to come off the winner, they persuaded him that of the three *he* was the best player, till—— but I dare not trust myself to repeat all their infamous designs," he exclaimed, passionately plucking at his moustache. "One evening they invited him to dine with them; and after inducing him to partake freely of wine; which had been previously drugged, they adjourned with him to a well-known gambling house, where, in the course of a few hours, the unfortunate young man lost the whole of his fortune.

"Meanwhile, his widowed mother, having received an anonymous communication, which troubled her exceedingly, and, not knowing what else to do, despatched a messenger to my quarters, explaining the nature of her fears, and also the name of the place where she imagined her son might be found.

"Without the loss of a moment, I started off in quest of him; but, when I discovered him, the foul deed had already been perpetrated, and the poor victim, overcome by grief, remorse, and despair, was making a violent effort to commit suicide. With great difficulty I succeeded in wresting the knife from his hand, and forced him, after the first appalling fit of frenzy had in some measure subsided, to accompany me home.

"A brain fever, of the most dangerous kind followed, and when at length his bodily health was re-established, it became painfully evident that the light of reason would never again illumine his mind."

Here he was interrupted by a low murmuring sound, expressive of sympathy and indignation; and as he glanced swiftly around the table, he observed more than one brow expanded in wondering horror.

"Since then," resumed the Major, endeavouring to speak calmly, "he has been subject to such terrible paroxysms of fury, that it is now found necessary to confine him, it being positively unsafe for any of his friends to remain in the same house with him. During these seasons of violence, he is, of course unable to discriminate between his friends and foes, and always fancies that he is struggling with the two young men to whom I have alluded (one of them a relation of his own), and obliging them to restore the property of which they so ruthlessly deprived him."

"And *they?*" asked Mr. Cleveland, his lip curling haughtily; "were no steps taken towards obliging them to relinquish their unlawful gains?"

"None," said the Major, gloomily; "no object could have been gained by publishing the matter, and therefore we preferred——"

"But surely they did not deserve to escape?"

"They did *not* altogether escape," returned Major Ramsay, energetically; "by some means or other the affair got whispered about, and on its reaching the ears of the gentlemen belonging to the same club of which themselves were members, they instantly testified their abhorrence of the transaction by informing them that if they wished to avoid being publicly disgraced they had better, of their own accord, withdraw from the club. This advice they were wise enough to follow: and as they both left London immediately afterwards, the affair was less talked of than it might otherwise have been."

"Were you personally acquainted with these *gentlemen?*" inquired Mr. Cleveland.

"*I was*," replied the Major, pressing his lips together.

"And—but I suppose I scarcely ought to ask the question—do you know what became of them?"

"*I do!*" was the deep-toned response.

An ejaculatory sound of grief and rage drew every eye towards Mr. Vernon, whose wild, unsettled look, and pale, ghastly countenance, as he leaned helplessly back in his chair, could not fail to create considerable alarm.

"What is the matter?" inquired Herbert, rising from his seat, and pouring some water into a tumbler. "Here, Reginald"—putting it into his hand—"will you offer him this?"

But Reginald also appeared strangely excited. His hand trembled visibly, and instead of raising the water to his friend's lips, he divided it between himself and the table-cloth, and ended by allowing the glass to slip from him, and roll upon the floor.

With a miserable attempt at a smile he stooped and picked it up, and then, glancing darkly at the Major, who seemed to view his agitation with stolid indifference, muttered something about the heat of the room.

At that moment the painful truth flashed simultaneously through the minds of Herbert and Sir Edward, and they exchanged a look of thrilling import.

Mr. Cleveland also had his suspicions aroused; though he essayed to assure himself that it would be doing his friends gross injustice to believe them guilty of conduct which he, with his fine sense of honour, could only regard as contemptible and ungentlemanlike in the extreme.

"How do you feel now, old fellow?" asked one of the young

men, leaning over the table, and eyeing Vernon with a serio-comic face.

"Oh, he is all right again!—eh! Vernon?" replied Reginald, giving his friend a cautionary tap on the shoulder; "it was just the heat that affected him."

"Yes," exclaimed Vernon, recovering himself, and speaking with unusual eagerness and rapidity, while he stole a half-frightened glance at Major Ramsay: "this room is excessively warm."

"Is it?" said the Major, with provoking emphasis; "to me it seems remarkably cool and pleasant!"

Again Mr. Vernon's face grew pale, and his eye quivered with an uncertain and gloomy fire; but Herbert, who saw and pitied his distress, came to his relief, by proposing that they should return to the drawing-room.

"What a fool you are, Vernon!" hissed Reginald in his ear, as they walked upstairs together. "I could hardly conceive you would make such an exhibition of yourself."

"I can't help it," he said deprecatingly.

"But you *must* help it," roughly returned Reginald, "unless you wish to hear the whole truth proclaimed."

"Has he not told everything, except the names?" cried Vernon, bitterly, "the meddlesome wretch!"

"Will you come near the instrument, Mr. Vernon?" inquired Herbert, conquering his repugnance, and approaching him with a grave though kindly smile; "Sir Edward is going to give us some music."

Not liking to refuse, he hastily disengaged his hand from Reginald's arm, and followed his host to the other end of the room, where the young baronet was just seating himself at the organ.

"What an extraordinary story the Major was telling us at dinner!" observed Reginald, drawing Herbert aside, about twenty minutes later, and speaking in a tone of affected carelessness, though he eagerly watched the effect of his words.

"Very," replied Herbert, gravely.

"Are you persuaded of the truth of it?" continued Reginald, lowering his voice.

"Would that I could say no!" aspirated his cousin, straightening his person, as if to ease some internal pain, and fixing his eyes full of deep sad meaning upon Reginald's face. "O Reginald!——" He stopped, and leant his elbow on the mantelpiece in an attitude of profound dejection."

"Pooh!" said the young man, throwing an uneasy glance around him; "I merely wanted to put you on your guard; but of course, if you choose to credit all you hear, it is nothing to me—*I* am not so easily imposed upon!"

"Whether I believe it or not is of little consequence, Reginald! but since you have thus unsolicited introduced the subject, it would be neither kind nor honest of me to lead you to suppose that I consider you guiltless in this matter. On the contrary, I think your conduct deserving of the gravest censure; and I can only hope that you also will soon be brought to look upon it in the same light."

There was a quiet dignity and solemn earnestness in Herbert's manner as he uttered these words of gentle reproof, which added greatly to the force of what he said.

Before Reginald could have time to frame a reply, his cousin had left him, and reached the opposite end of the room, where he entered into conversation with Mr. Cleveland, whose quiet and thoughtful demeanour, ever since they left the dinner-table, he had remarked with interest and surprise.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MEDITATED STRIKE.

" Oh, well for man, to whom is given
One day from meaner thoughts reprieved!
Oh, ill for man, if all the seven
For earthly needs he toiled and grieved!
O sons of toil, in respite holy,
Come forth the works of God to see!
But first within His temple lowly,
Unbare the head, and bow the knee! C. L. FORD.

DATING from the evening when Mr. Snapson was first made acquainted with some of Herbert's peculiar engagements, his manner towards him underwent a very perceptible change.

An accession of coldness and sullen formality took the place of the bland courtesy with which he had of late regarded him, and he watched his proceedings with jealous and prejudiced eyes, seeking, as it were, to detect some blemish in a character which puzzled and rendered him uncomfortable by the striking contrast it presented to his own.

Albert was often the unconscious instrument of adding to his father's uneasiness, for he appeared quite indignant if others failed to view Herbert's performances in the same admiring spirit as he did himself; and Mr. Snapson, strongly as he felt on the subject, thought it wiser to refrain from openly discussing it with *him*, though his sentiments were well understood by Mrs. Snapson and the rest of the family.

Secretly he tried many methods of severing the bond which seemed to unite Herbert to his idolised son; but he had little reason to congratulate himself on effecting his aim, Albert's admiration continuing unabated long after Mr. Snapson had fondly hoped it would expire in a natural death.

Perhaps he might have been unable to account even to his own mind for the grievous disappointment this caused him; and yet it was scarcely surprising that he should shrink from listening to the constantly repeated praises of one whose whole course of action was a tacit reproach to himself.

How could it, for instance, be a source of gratification for him to learn that those duties which ought rightfully to devolve upon *him* should be undertaken by another, and that other almost a stranger to the neighbourhood?

It is just possible, moreover, that Mr. Snapson's jealousy and suspicion were strengthened by comparing his unpopularity (of which he could not help being slightly conscious) with the influence Herbert had in so short a time acquired over his *employés*. It mattered little to him whether this influence was of an elevating or degrading nature; he was too illiberal and narrow-minded to approve of the former, too strict and austere to tolerate the latter.

A very small amount of sagacity was required to enable one to perceive that, although Mr. Snapson had originally occupied a humble position in life, and known in his own person the toils of labour and the inconveniences and discomforts of poverty, it did not, therefore, follow that he treated those under himself with any unusual degree of indulgence or consideration.

That his ruling passion still held undivided sway over him was evidenced by the manner in which he conducted all business transactions, no less than the absorbing interest and keen vigilance he manifested in the successful working of his various long-established manufactories; and, whilst rigorously exacting in his demands, stern and unforgiving where he saw, or fancied, any slight dereliction of duty; and extorting from his workmen the utmost extent of labour they were capable of rendering; he cared no more for their comfort or prosperity, either bodily, mentally, or spiritually, than if they had been mere machines, destitute alike of sense or feeling.

It was in vain that they represented to him the ruinous condition of their cottages, and also sought redress from a few other grievances, of which they considered themselves justly entitled to complain; Mr. Snapson treated their respectful remonstrances with proud disdain, and flatly refused to accede to their joint petitions.

It was at this peculiar juncture that Herbert's influence became especially apparent.

In his visitations among the people, murmurs, not loud but deep, reached his ear; and obscure threats of vengeance, or darkly hinted denunciations of wrath against some nameless individual, were frequently commenced in his hearing, both by men and women, who stopped abruptly on remembering in whose presence they were; and when he would have urged them to set his mind at rest, by explaining the mysterious hints, they shook their heads, resolutely pressed their lips together, and remained obstinately deaf to all his earnest entreaties.

Days passed on, and Mr. Snapson's *employés* pursued their avocations as heretofore, going to their work in the morning with a heavy, sullen cloud upon their brow, and returning home at night with gloomy, rebellious spirits, intent only on revenge.

Meantime, secret meetings were held, speeches made, resolutions proposed, seconded, and unanimously carried; and ultimately it was decided that suddenly, and as one man, they would leave the service of their haughty and imperious master.

The following pay-day was fixed upon as the proper time for taking this conclusive step, as it chanced to fall on a Saturday.

Every precaution having been used, and the meetings conducted with the utmost secrecy, both as regards time and place, the deluded workmen had no fear of their purpose being suspected; and there was perhaps scarcely one among them who did not rejoice at the thought of the pecuniary loss which such a proceeding must entail upon Mr. Snapson.

Saturday came and went; the hands received their wages in the same quiet and undemonstrative fashion as they were accustomed to. There was nothing in their manner to mark the deep surgings which had been agitating their breasts, nothing to arouse suspicion or awaken distrust.

The holy Sabbath, too, dawned peacefully and brightly on the sons

of toil; but, instead of setting forth with their wives and families for the house of prayer, they might have been seen loitering about in twos and threes, earnestly conversing together; while the sounds which came now and again from the badly repaired cottages, spoke of bustle and confusion, such as could only be accounted for by supposing that some of the female part of the population were packing their furniture, previous to its removal.

Not all!

In more than one of those otherwise miserable dwellings it could with truth be written—Jehovah Shammah—the Lord is there!

There sits a mother, surrounded by her children; and as she reads to them out of the Book of Life, and answers their simple yet intelligent questions, a holy light shines on her pale, wan face, and the anxious lines which care—not time—have deeply furrowed across her meek brow, all disappear before the heaven-lit smile that glances over lip and cheek, like some stray gleam of glorious sunshine, forcing its way into an erewhile darkened chamber!

And the husband and father, where is he?

Not far off. Do you see that largest group of men assembled near the carpenter's shed (empty to-day, Herbert having gone to preach to a set of miners in a distant hamlet), and that tall Herculean man, to whom the others are listening with such deferential attention? That is Daniel Mortice, one of the most skilful and industrious workmen belonging to the Colton factory. He is also a favourite with his fellow-workmen, because of the undaunted boldness and self-reliant independence of his character, which led him to rebel against anything like injustice or oppression, and encouraged the more timid and irresolute to follow his example. In this affair he took, as usual, a prominent part. His proud spirit chafed at the contumely Mr. Snapson had heaped upon them in their recent interview with him; and it was he who first muttered the ominous word "*strike*," and represented to his companions the cowardice of tamely submitting to their rights being thus ignominiously thrust aside, and without a struggle own themselves defeated!

His arguments, heightened and enforced by a kind of rude eloquence, very effective in such cases, were quickly and heartily responded to.

Only a few of the older and more prudent hands (having probably learnt from past experience that in the event of their purposes being carried into execution, the consequences to themselves and families would be none of the pleasantest) held back for a while, dubious and hesitating.

Even these were, however, now united; and if they felt any remaining doubts as to the wisdom of the plan, they kept them locked up within their own breasts.

Had, then, Herbert's labours among them resulted merely in *apparent* success?

Ah, no; some of these very individuals had been reclaimed from open and long-practised sin by his instrumentality, and for months had given convincing proof of a thorough change of mind and heart. In this matter, however erroneous their opinion may have been, they persuaded themselves and each other that the course they proposed adopting was, under the circumstances, perfectly justifiable.

But to proceed with my story.

The quiet Sabbath hours sped rapidly away; and ere the evening

shadows had gathered stealthily around the village, everything seemed hushed into profound repose.

On a wide moor, about three miles from Colton, and nearly equidistant from the other hamlets, Mr. Snapson's workmen were all assembled, according to a preconcerted arrangement, for the purpose of holding a final meeting in which to adjust whatever yet continued unsettled respecting their future conduct.

The weather was cold and frosty; but as the moon, with its silvery, passionless light, shone placidly down upon the motley crowd, thus strangely gathered together beneath the open canopy of heaven, it gave a wild and picturesque appearance to the whole scene.

The speakers, who were for the most part short and energetic in their language, had for upwards of an hour been striving to impress upon each other the absolute need of firmness and determination in carrying out the task they had already commenced, when Daniel Mortice, taking advantage of a momentary pause, mounted a sort of natural rocky platform, which raised him considerably above his companions, and began for the second time that evening to denounce Mr. Snapson's practices and principles in no measured terms, while eulogising the manly spirit that had induced them to stand up for their own rights.

From this he went on to describe the nature of those "rights," and ended at length by making a florid appeal to the divers prejudices of his fellow-labourers.

When he had sufficiently excited their pride, and confirmed and strengthened their resolution, he paused, and exchanged a sentence or two with those who stood nearest him. Then, drawing a Bible from his pocket, he held it up, and again raising his voice said slowly and impressively,—

"Now let all those who are prepared manfully to resist the overtures which will probably be made them within a few hours, join me in the oath it is proposed for us to take. I will set the example."

And he was proceeding to utter the usual formula, when, to the surprise and consternation of every one, a tall figure slid like a shadow down a steep and stony bank; and a deep, solemn voice exclaimed, in accents of thrilling earnestness,—

"*Swear not at all!*"

Daniel Mortice started and looked around him with a guilty, scared look, as though he had been suddenly detected in some crime; while a hasty movement among the audience showed that their agitation was commensurate with his own.

"My brethren, swear not!" repeated Herbert (for he it was), reaching by one bound the rocky ledge whereon Mortice was standing; "'But let your communication be Yea, yea; and Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil!'"

"It is only Mr. Seymour," cried several voices, in obvious relief; but Mortice seemed angry and disquieted.

"Daniel," said Herbert, knowing full well the character he had to deal with, "*Daniel*"—and he laid his hand upon the strong man's muscular arm—"why are you determined, not only to fall into condemnation yourself, but also to drag others down with you?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mortice, somewhat falteringly.

"And you, my friends," continued Herbert, slightly lifting his voice, "how is it that I find you here?"

There was no answer to this question, but in the pale moonlight the men began to gaze wistfully into each other's faces.

"Ah, my friends, I fear I am only too well acquainted with the motive which has drawn you together! Little did I think I should ever have to meet you on such a painful occasion as the present; little did I think that you—and are there not many such now before me?—you whom I have had the inexpressible happiness of pointing to the Friend of sinners, whose hearts have been touched and melted by His love, would thus be brought to deny Him."

"Deny Him!" ejaculated an old man just below, with a quick, gasping sound.

"Yes, what else can you call it?" gravely returned Herbert. "Are we not commanded to remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy, to live peaceably with all men, to resist not evil, to beware of doing evil that good may come; nay, even to avoid the very appearance of evil? And is this what you are doing, dear friends? Are you striving to follow the example of your blessed Lord and Master? Are you walking in His footsteps, breathing forth *His* spirit, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; who was kind unto the unthankful and evil? Ah! my brethren, I very much fear you have forgotten Him this evening, forgotten His love and forbearance with yourselves; how tender and and pitiful He is to your wanderings and infirmities; how gently He chides, how slow He is to anger, while plenteous in mercy! Had you remembered all this, you would, I am persuaded, have acted quite differently in the present business."

"I don't see what else we could have done," said Mortice, trying to assume an air of bravado. "We tried fair measures first, and, as they failed, it was only to be expected that we should look out for ourselves."

"Did you try the efficacy of patient, believing prayer?" mildly inquired Herbert.

"No, I can't say that I did," he answered, with a sort of sneer.

"I thought so. Had you——"

"But, after all, sir," interrupted Mortice, hastily, "what use could prayer be in such a case as this?"

"What use?" repeated Herbert, lifting his hand towards the starry heavens, while a faint glow illumined his cheeks. "If you knew the worth of prayer, Daniel, you would scarcely need to ask the question. What use?" he re-echoed, in an earnest, impressive voice. "Has it not stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, inspired the weak with strength to subdue the strong, armed the timid with courage and the ignorant with wisdom, as well as brought light out of darkness, joy out of sorrow, and life out of death? Go home and ask your wife what it did for *her*," continued Herbert, still addressing Mortice, "when you met with that sad accident which threatened to extinguish your earthly existence some months ago."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the man, in an agitated voice.

"Fearing that you were all unmeet and unprepared to appear before your Maker, she fervently and unceasingly besought the Lord to spare your life, and not cut you off in the midst of your sins; and you see her prayer was granted. Who shall presume to say that it was not in answer to some feeble petition, offered in solitude this very evening, by a humble follower of the Lamb, that I was sent hither to prevent the accomplishment of your design?"

A long and solemn silence ensued.

At length a voice in the crowd asked, "How would you have us act, sir?"

"A straightforward question, my friend, and one which deserves a straightforward answer," said Herbert. "I would have you all, without exception, return to your work as usual to-morrow morning. Your purpose is not as yet suspected, and therefore——"

"But, sir," exclaimed Mortice,—apparently loth to relinquish his anticipated revenge on Mr. Snapson,—"we cannot consent to draw back like a set of mean-spirited cowards?"

"Not like *cowards*, but wise men," responded Herbert, with energy. "In this business it would be far more cowardly to advance than retreat. I appeal to yourselves: is it not so? Who but cowards would voluntarily plunge their wives and families into poverty and distress, deliberately depriving them of every comfort, taking the very bread from their children's mouths, and introducing destitution, accompanied, probably, by discord, and its twin-sister misery, into homes which had formerly been happy and prosperous, rather than submit to a few inconveniences, which in a short time may, by proper management, be removed?"

"He is right!" cried the old man who had before spoken; "God forgive me for thus suffering myself to be led astray. A little patience, and we might have obtained what we wanted, without taking the law into our own hands."

Several others hung their heads, feeling the truth of the remark; and Motice, in whose mind had risen, while Herbert was speaking, a vivid picture of his own humble home, his meekly enduring and prayerful wife, and small, helpless children, remained for a moment thoughtfully silent.

"And now, dear friends, the evening wears away," said Herbert, after allowing them a short time in which to make their decision; "may I go away cheered by the assurance that you will do as I have suggested? This is, of course, neither the time nor place for us to enter upon the subject of your grievances; but if you would like to depute some of your number to call on me to-morrow, I shall willingly listen to your explanations, and if they seem to me of sufficient importance to account for your disaffection, I will myself undertake the responsibility of representing your sentiments to Mr. Snapson."

This proposition was unanimously and thankfully accepted; and having thus far executed his self-imposed task, Herbert commended them to the guidance and protection of "the very God of peace" in a brief yet impressive prayer; after which he had the satisfaction of seeing them disperse to their several homes, animated by another spirit than that in which they left them.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE REJECTED PETITION.

"*Cam.:* Be advised.
Flo: I am; and by my fancy: if my reason
Will hitherto be obedient, I have reason;
If not, my senses, better pleased with madness,
Do bid it welcome."' *Winter's Tale.*

"When wicked men *want* estates, they are troubled *for* them; and when they *have* estates, they are troubled *with* them." DYER.

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the *things of others.*"

THE office which Herbert had voluntarily undertaken, would, he knew, so far as Mr. Snapson was concerned, prove a thankless and perhaps unavailing one.

Still, he was resolved to make the attempt. Matters *might*—so he reasoned with himself—be improved; *worse* they could not well be.

Accordingly, after taking great pains to form a clear and impartial judgment of the case, and ascertaining how the claims of the one party could be reconciled to the interest and consequent expectations of the other, he waited on Mr. Snapson.

Seldom had that gentleman looked less amiable than when his peace-making neighbour announced the object of his visit, and mildly represented to him the present dissatisfaction of his workmen, and the practical annoyance he might receive from them, unless he agreed to make certain alterations and improvements in their condition.

"And in what may these alterations and improvements consist?" asked Mr. Snapson, with scornful irony.

"In this paper," replied Herbert, who refrained from reminding him that he was already fully acquainted with their requirements, "I have taken the liberty of noting down a few particulars, which I might otherwise have omitted to mention; and by glancing through it you will, I think, at once perceive the reasonableness of their demands."

"Their demands, forsooth!" exclaimed Mr. Snapson, in a voice that trembled with suppressed passion: "the idle scoundrels—how dare they thus presume to dictate to me!"

However, he took the paper, and rapidly scanned its contents. Then, flinging it down on the table, he continued sneeringly,—

"Really, I should feel much obliged if you would inform me what your proper vocation is, sir; for I confess I am quite unable to determine, owing to the variety of characters it pleases you to assume. First of all, I was given to understand that you were a private gentleman, unencumbered with *any* profession; secondly, you appear in the light of an itinerant clergyman; and now, I find you acting as a sort of self-elected arbitrator, or agent, between myself and my workmen!"

"I am well aware," said Herbert, without betraying the slightest shadow of anger or pride, "that in undertaking the last-mentioned duty, I run the risk of incurring your displeasure, on account of my apparently uncalled-for interference in your affairs, and also afford an opportunity, should you wish it, of questioning my motives."

"But why lay yourself open to such an imputation?" asked Mr. Snapson, in a dry, caustic tone.

"Because I should not be justified in considering my own individual feelings, where the welfare of so many others is at stake," returned Herbert, still with the utmost good humour; "and in my anxiety to bring about a satisfactory arrangement between yourself and your *employés*, I——"

"But what is all this to *you*, sir?" cried Mr. Snapson, on whom his gentleness seemed to have an exasperating effect; "what right have you to meddle with my servants?"

"As you mean it, none," said Herbert, frankly; "still you must be conscious that it is as much for your interest as theirs, that you should come to terms."

"How so?" demanded the wrathful gentleman, pushing his chair from the table, and beginning to pace the apartment.

"You have heard of strikes?" observed Herbert, significantly.

Mr. Snapson laughed scornfully.

"My workmen are not fools!" was his empathic answer.

"H'm!" said Herbert, rather embarrassed (he had resolved on making no allusion to the scene he witnessed on the previous Sabbath); "if you will be guided by me——"

"Excuse me," interposed Mr. Snapson, drawing himself up with considerable *hauteur*; "I am perfectly capable of judging for myself in this matter, and can brook no interference—even from you!"

These last words were added with an expression of unmistakable irony; while the stern compression of his thin lips, and the angry gleam that flashed from his eyes, was enough to convince Herbert of the utter futility of expecting to produce any favourable impression in his sterile heart.

Nevertheless, he made another effort to obtain his consent to the proposed arrangements (which, though of the greatest consequence to the workmen and their families, would be attended with very little inconvenience to Mr. Snapson); but, as might have been anticipated, his appeal was totally unresponded to; neither by word nor look did Mr. Snapson evince the smallest interest in the welfare of his dependents, or acknowledge himself bound in the slightest degree to contribute to their comfort.

At last, Herbert, repelled by the coldness of his manner, and disgusted with his selfish and ungenerous conduct, rose hastily from his seat, and, surveying Mr. Snapson with that calm superiority which is born of conscious integrity of purpose, remarked, in a grave, almost severe tone,—

"Well, sir, I conclude, from your language, that you positively refuse to accede to the conditions referred to in this paper?"

"You are right, sir; I *do* refuse, most decidedly."

"Then I have only to apologise for thus taking up your time; and, however strongly I may regret your determination, it will be my duty to repeat it to the men on whose behalf I came."

"That is as you please," returned Mr. Snapson, in a tone of supreme indifference.

"I should not be acting the part of a friend, were I to lead you to suppose that no disagreeable consequences will accrue to yourself from this decision," said Herbert, with deep seriousness.

"Thank you," was the curt reply; "forewarned is forearmed."

"I hope it may be so in this case. Good morning."

"Good morning," responded Mr. Snapson, holding out his hand. "I trust your next visit will prove a more pleasant one for both parties." And, after accompanying him with ceremonious politeness to the hall-door, he returned alone to his library, full of bitter and uncomfortable reflections.

Presently he drew his writing-desk towards him, and having rapidly penned a short note, rang the bell, and ordered the servant who answered his summons to take it without a moment's delay to the factory, and deliver it to Mr. Greyson, the principal manager.

This done, he was about to resume his seat, when his eye inadvertently fell upon the paper, which Herbert had forgotten to carry away with him, and instantly opening it, he proceeded again to study its contents.

While Mr. Snapson was thus employed, Albert entered the room for the purpose of reminding him of some promise he had made; but seeing the stern and unobservant gaze with which his father regarded him, he took up a volume of engravings, and retreated to the other end of the room, intending to wait until he should seem more at leisure About five minutes elapsed, and then the library door was suddenly opened, and Mr. Greyson announced.

Mr. Snapson threw himself back in his large and softly cushioned chair near the fire, and eyed the new comer, a thin, wiry-looking middle-aged man, in evident displeasure.

"Read that, sir," he said, handing him the paper, which himself had been perusing.

Mr. Greyson promptly obeyed.

"Now, sir, be good enough to explain the meaning of all this," pursued the gentleman, in a cold, hard tone.

"Well, sir, if you had asked me that question yesterday, I could not have answered it."

"And why not? who *should* know what is going on amongst the men, if *you* do not?" said Mr. Snapson, severely.

"Of course I was aware that they had applied to yourself on the subject of their grievances," replied Mr. Greyson, deferentially; "but as you informed me of the answer you gave them, I naturally concluded that they were content; especially as they never repeated their complaints——"

"And what is this but a repetition of their complaints?" exclaimed Mr. Snapson, hotly. "I cannot help thinking you are greatly to blame, Greyson," he went on, contracting his brows.

"Me, sir!" cried the astonished manager, with a deprecating gesture; "how could I help it?"

"You could at least have prevented them from applying to Mr. Seymour."

"I did not even guess that the meeting had taken place until to-day," observed Mr. Greyson, "and that I discovered by the merest chance."

"The meeting!" repeated Mr. Snapson, impatiently, "what meeting?"

"The last decisive one, which was held on Sunday night. I suppose Mr. Seymour gave you all the particulars?"

"Indeed he did nothing of the kind," said Mr. Snapson, rather testily; "you surely do not mean to tell me these insolent scoundrels have had the presumption to hold *meetings* on the subject?"

"It is all too true, sir," said the manager, in a grave, concerned tone; "and I very much fear that if (as I conclude is the case) you have sent, through Mr. Seymour, a final rejection of their suit, the factory will be closed to-morrow, for want of hands."

"The factory closed—impossible!" cried Mr. Snapson, perfectly thunderstruck.

Mr. Greyson shook his head very hopelessly, as he continued,—

"The fact is, sir, I was just on the point of coming to apprise you of what I had heard, when I received your note; for I could not help feeling uneasy at the present aspect of affairs."

"Pray explain yourself!" said Mr. Snapson, regaining his usual manner, and fixing his keen, piercing eyes full upon him. "I confess I see nothing to justify your apprehensions."

"As I said before, it was quite accidentally that I learnt anything of their plans. I cannot, therefore, give you the name of my informant; but I believe he may be strictly depended upon."

"All this is nothing to the purpose," remarked Mr. Snapson, barely able to suppress his disquietude. "Tell me, in a word, what is it that has awakened your fears?"

"It seems that the hands have been for some time meditating a strike——"

"The ungrateful wretches!" interpolated Mr. Snapson.

The faintest shadow of a smile flickered over Mr. Greyson's lips; but ere Mr. Snapson could observe it, it had disappeared, and he went on, in a voice of profound gravity,—

"Last Saturday they received their pay as usual, and left the factory, without giving the slightest hint that they had no intention of returning to their work on Monday morning. Such was, however, the case, and had it not been for Mr. Seymour they would assuredly have carried out their resolve."

Mr. Snapson winced at this allusion to Herbert, but he made no attempt at interrupting him, and Mr. Greyson continued,—

"It was only on the Sunday afternoon that he became acquainted with their design, and although several miles off, he instantly procured a horse, and rode home, hoping he might be in time to prevent a meeting, which they had arranged to hold on the Dunford Moor."

"I presume you had these particulars from Mr. Seymour's own lips," insinuated Mr. Snapson.

"You are wrong, sir; I am totally unacquainted with that gentleman. It was an eye-witness, whose name, as I previously mentioned——"

"I see, I see," responded Mr. Snapson, quietly. "Go on, sir."

"With all his speed Mr. Seymour arrived too late to stop the meeting; it was, in fact, nearly over when he at length reached the indicated spot; and the men were in the very act of binding themselves by a solemn oath to stand by each other in the coming contest, and resist every effort we might put forth to induce them to return to their work.

"You may judge of the astonishment which his unexpected appearance caused them. After snatching the Bible out of the hands of

the man who was repeating the words of the prescribed oath" (a slight exaggeration on the part of Mr. Greyson's informant this), "he severely reprimanded them for their conduct; accused them of breaking the Sabbath; denounced the practice of uttering oaths, especially on such an occasion, and represented to them, in forcible language, the doubtful advantage they would gain by persisting in the course they proposed adopting. Then, finding them still obstinate, he promised that if they would quietly resume their accustomed duties the next morning, he would himself present their petition to you. This I see he has done; and I cannot help remarking" (referring again to the paper Herbert had left) "that he appears to have succeeded in persuading them to modify the terms very considerably. Several items which they laid great stress on before, are here omitted; and altogether the stipulations are more reasonable. I really think, sir," added Mr. Greyson, casting a furtive glance at the stern face of his companion, "we ought to be grateful for Mr. Seymour's interposition."

Mr. Snapson looked exceedingly perturbed. He almost regretted now having given Herbert such an ungracious reception; and while feeling the injustice of his own suspicions, he marvelled at the unselfishness and dignity of mind which could lead our hero thus to avoid all mention of what he had done.

Still, pride—that formidable stumbling-block in the way of thousands—disinclined him to relent; for when Mr. Greyson, mistaking his silence for assent, ventured to suggest that it might be prudent to come to some amicable agreement with the disaffected workmen, he turned upon him in unmigitated wrath, and asked acrimoniously,—

"Am I in the habit of recalling my verdict, Mr. Greyson?"

"Pardon me for the assertion," said the manager, respectfully; "but in this instance it will be little short of madness to stand out for such a trifle."

"Be it so," retorted Mr. Snapson, with a haughty flash.

"Then it is your desire, sir, that the factory should be closed to-morrow?" observed Mr. Greyson, who well knew his weak point.

Mr. Snapson's countenance fell, and he seemed for the space of a minute or two to be intent on some mental calculation.

"I do not see why that should be necessary, Greyson. A certain amount of policy is required—nothing more—to bring these men back to a sense of their duty."

Mr. Greyson's face expressed the utmost incredulity.

"If Mr. Seymour is unable to influence them in this matter——"

"*Mr. Seymour!*" cried his companion, with asperity; "what an elevated opinion you have formed of *him*, and everything connected with him!"

"It is impossible for me to shut my eyes to the wonderful change he has helped to effect in many of the worst characters belonging to the factory (and, although I don't profess to know much about religion myself, I can't help thinking it an excellent thing for the lower order); those who were formerly idle and drunken in their habits, have become sober and industrious, whilst——"

"You are commencing a regular dissertation, Greyson," said Mr. Snapson, smiling disdainfully; "but it strikes me that your language is rather inconsistent, for if Mr. Seymour had really done so much good among these men, would they be so ready to join in this disgraceful business?"

"In such a case," replied Mr. Greyson, hesitatingly, "they persuade themselves that they are fully justified in considering their own interests."

"Justified, indeed!" began Mr. Snapson, in accents of warm indignation; but ere he could proceed with his sentence, he was startled by hearing a quick, excited voice at his elbow, saying, "Papa, you must give in!" And, looking hurriedly round, he saw Albert standing beside his chair, with bright, sparkling eyes, and a deep red flush upon each cheek.

CHAPTER LV.

MR. SNAPSON COMPELLED TO GIVE IN.

"Where Piety and Policy go hand in hand, there war shall be just, and peace honourable." QUARLES.

"We cannot expect too little from man, or too much from God." MATTHEW HENRY.

"The poorer class,
Taxed with oppressive toil whilst freemen called,
Were literally slaves in all but name,
And groaned beneath their burdens." LEASK.

"WHY, Albert, my boy, where did you come from?" inquired his father, in conscious embarrassment.

But the lad's sole reply to this question was a repetition of his former exclamation,—

"Papa, you must give in!"

"Nonsense," returned Mr. Snapson, laying his hand caressingly upon his head, and attempting to speak with playful indifference; "what can *you* know about such matters?"

"I know one thing," he answered, energetically.

"Do you?" said his father, gazing absently into the fire.

"I am very sure that we can't go wrong in following Mr. Seymour's advice."

Mr. Snapson suppressed an exclamation of impatience, but an involuntary frown wrinkled his forehead.

"Depend upon it," continued Albert, confidentially, "*he* would never recommend anything that is not perfectly fair and reasonable."

"It is no concern of his," hastily interjected Mr. Snapson.

"Ah, but he is such a fine, unselfish fellow," was Albert's enthusiastic reply.

"No doubt, no doubt," said Mr. Snapson, ironically; adding with irrepressible bitterness, while darting a significant glance at Mr. Greyson, "at all events, he seems an adept in the art of captivation."

"I don't know what you mean," replied Albert, innocently.

A slight grimace, something between a smile and a frown, distorted Mr. Snapson's countenance, as he turned his eyes again upon the glowing coals, gloomy, and full of thought.

Meanwhile Albert, holding out his hand for the document, the contents of which had caused his father so much umbrage, and which Mr. Greyson continued to keep possession of, mutely signified his wish to read it for himself.

The manager instantly relinquished it, inwardly pleased at the decided manner in which he had delivered his opinion—his (Mr. Greyson's) inclination disposing him to accept the terms proposed by Herbert; *not* from any feeling of sympathy with the workmen, or desire to benefit them, but because he did not care to incur the trouble, inconveniences, and pecuniary loss which might possibly

accrue to himself in the event of their carrying out their present determination.

"Well, papa, I suppose there is no time to be lost," said Albert, with a vehemence which astonished Mr. Snapson; "unless we bestir ourselves, we shall be too late to——"

"What are you talking about, my boy?" asked Mr. Snapson, averting his face from the bright, steady gaze which was, he knew, fixed on him.

"The strike, of course," was the answer, given with feverish impatience; "do let us make haste, papa;" and the boy laid hold of his father's arm, as though he would fain drag him forcibly from the room.

"Make haste *where?*" questioned Mr. Snapson, rising from his seat, and facing him suddenly with a keen, searching glance.

"To the factory, papa."

"The factory!" echoed the gentleman, recoiling a step or two, while his eyes gleamed angrily; "what on earth should we do there?"

"Speak to the workmen," replied Albert, in an earnest, pleading tone, "and promise to give them all they require."

"Albert, this subject is beyond your comprehension," said Mr. Snapson, rather sternly.

"Indeed, papa, I understand it perfectly," was the quick and somewhat indignant response; "I should be a fool if I did *not;* it is as clear as daylight."

"You little know the characters with whom we have to deal," pursued Mr. Snapson, in his sharp, authoritative way; nothing but decisive measures will prove efficacious in such a case as this."

"But, after all, papa, they only want justice," returned Albert, with a burst of generous warmth; "they only ask you to treat them the same as other masters."

"Really, Albert, I cannot allow you to proceed," cried Mr. Snapson, in violent anger, which he vainly endeavoured to control; "you have said far more than enough. As I had occasion to remark just now, I am not in the habit of contradicting myself."

These words were spoken so haughtily and sternly, that Albert continued for a short time to regard him in evident and painful perplexity. Then, seeing no signs of relenting upon his father's countenance, his lip quivered, and hot tears rushed to his large blue eyes. He dashed them proudly away, however, and, straightening his slight figure with a sort of defiant gesture, hurried out of the room. Scarcely a moment elapsed before he returned, carrying an ebony box in his hand. This box he placed on the table, and, after opening it with eager, trembling fingers, rapidly threw out its contents.

"There!" he exclaimed, pointing triumphantly to a promiscuous heap of gold, silver, and bank-notes, "it is not as much as I could wish, but it will be better than nothing. Take it, sir," he continued, turning excitedly towards Mr. Greyson, "and give it to them!"

"To whom?" inquired the manager, completely mystified.

"The workmen; who else? Tell them I will send them all my pocket-money, so long as they remain unemployed. Take it!" he reiterated petulantly, as Mr. Greyson hesitated, and looked at Mr. Snapson; "if *you* refuse, I will carry it to them myself, and let them know how sorry I am to hear they have been treated so badly."

It was a trying moment for Mr. Snapson. An instant and distress-

ing emotion became visible on his face, and many contending passions swayed his breast. He noted with extreme uneasiness the unnatural brilliancy of Albert's cheeks, the strange defiant light which flashed from his eyes, and the fire and excitability of his manner, as he stood flushed and struggling with internal agitation; and though the idea of submitting to the demands of his importunate *employés* was very galling to his pride, he felt it would be preferable to make *any* sacrifice rather than endanger the health of this acutely sensitive lad, whose delicacy of constitution was already too apparent.

"My dear Albert," he said, steadying his lips with an effort, and speaking in a low, quivering voice, "how is it that you take so much interest in this affair?"

"Because I can't help it!" he answered, passionately; "I can't *bear* to see the poor men——"

"Well, well, never mind about that," interrupted Mr. Snapson, soothingly; "come and tell me what *you* would do, if I were to put the matter into *your* hands."

"I would run off to Seymour at once, and ask him to go and inform them that you had agreed to give in."

"But that would be subjecting myself to the charge of fickleness," muttered Mr. Snapson, his mind still in a ferment, "besides being a tacit admission that *I* was in the wrong—an inference which I cannot for a moment connive at."

"If I might be permitted to make a suggestion," observed Mr. Greyson, who had been watching his opportunity, and now thought the time had come for him to put in a word, "I would remind you that we could easily explain to the men, that, in consequence of your son having interceded on their behalf, you had, *to please him*, consented to further their wishes. By doing this, and representing it as a favour spontaneously granted, instead of a right conceded, you will, I think, entirely avoid the appearance of wishing to conciliate them, and at the same time succeed in inducing them to resume their accustomed place in the factory to-morrow morning."

"There is a great deal of truth in what you say, Greyson," replied Mr. Snapson, regarding him with a glance of approbation (he really felt grateful to him for so readily comprehending and plausibly answering his half-expressed sentiments); "and although I would, for *my* part, greatly prefer leaving these wilful men to follow their own course, yet, as this foolish boy," throwing his arm affectionately over Albert's shoulder, "seems to take it so much to heart, I suppose I must humour him for the nonce."

"Oh, thank you, papa," gleefully responded the lad; "I was beginning to fancy you hard and cruel, but——"

"There, that will do," hastily interposed his father, to whom such doubtful compliments as Albert was in the habit of paying him were peculiarly unacceptable. "Perhaps," addressing Mr. Greyson, "i might be necessary for me to inform Mr. Seymour, that I am willin to revoke my decision."

"Don't write, papa!" cried Albert, as Mr. Snapson began to arrange his writing materials.

"Why not?" questioned the gentleman, laying down his pen.

"Because it would be far pleasanter for us to speak to him ourselves; and then we could ask him how it was he said nothing to you about the meeting."

"That is of little consequence now," remarked Mr. Snapson, meditatively. "However, I have no objection to call on him, if you wish it. I dare say it will be as well," he softly murmured to himself; "I owe him some slight apology for receiving him so coldly, and there cannot be a more appropriate season than the present for adjusting my disagreement. Run, Albert, and get your hat," continued Mr. Snapson, in his habitual tone of firm decision.

The boy needed no second bidding. He only delayed long enough to sweep the shining heap of gold and silver into its former repository, and, then, box in hand, made for the door.

"Careless boy!" said Mr. Snapson, calling him back, and pointing with an indulging smile to a bank-note which had fallen unperceived by him to the ground, and now lay under the table; "careless boy!" he repeated, gazing tenderly into his fragile-looking face, from which the bright crimson flush had almost disappeared, "it is quite evident that you are very unfit to be trusted with money."

"All right, papa," laughed Albert, picking it up, and putting it unconcernedly in his pocket; "I don't suppose the housemaid would have burnt it, even if I had left it there."

"Burnt it—perhaps not," answered his father, with a comprehensive elevation of the brows, and a sarcastic, unbelieving smile about the mouth, which puzzled his unsophisticated son.

"Are you ready?" asked the latter, after a moment's patient waiting.

"Yes," said Mr. Snapson, locking his desk. "Mr. Greyson, you will, I presume, accompany us?"

The manager started from a reverie into which he had unconsciously fallen,—bowed,—glanced hastily at the little French clock standing on the mantelshelf,—and then silently followed Albert out of the room.

He did not speak until they were half-way down the long avenue, when he observed, in a tone of apparent indifference,—

"Won't you announce your decision to the men yourself, sir?"

"No, no," replied Mr. Snapson, pressing his lips tightly together; "I see no reason why I should give myself such unnecessary trouble. Mr. Seymour can manage all that."

"Of course you know best, sir," pursued Mr. Greyson, blandly; "I simply asked the question, because I fancied you might probably like to give the matter as much publicity as possible, in order to make it appear entirely your own doing; and, in that case, it occurred to me whether it would not be a good plan to assemble the men in the large court before they leave their work (which will be in less than half an hour), where you could, if you felt disposed, either speak to them yourself, or get Mr. Seymour to do so—in your presence."

"I perceive your meaning, Greyson," said Mr. Snapson, quickly; "you want me to make a virtue of necessity, by adopting measures to prevent these discontented fellows from supposing that they have compelled me to surrender?"

"Precisely," responded the manager, a curious little smile coming to his lips.

"It's by no means a bad idea," pondered Mr. Snapson; "I will see what Mr. Seymour says about it."

"I wonder if he is at home," cried Albert, as he opened the gate of Herbert's garden, and bounded up the walk.

Mr. Snapson and the manager followed more slowly; but immediately the latter heard that he whom they were in quest of *was* at home, he excused himself from entering the house, and hurried off to the factory.

Herbert was in his study when his visitors arrived, and thither James Gordon conducted them—although to Albert this seemed a very unnecessary piece of attention, he being by this time as well acquainted with every part of the cottage as Herbert himself.

"Now it is my turn to apologise for disturbing *you*," said Mr. Snapson, coming forward, and addressing Herbert with unusual affability, "and also to thank you for the trouble and——"

"Papa is going to give in," abruptly explained Albert, who had an intense dislike to long introductions; "papa is going to give in, and we come to tell you."

Mr. Snapson was evidently far from pleased at this interruption, but he seemed bent on rendering himself agreeable, and merely smiled at Albert's plain speaking, without reproving him for it.

"Is it indeed so?" asked Herbert, turning inquiringly towards him, and feeling as if a load had been instantaneously lifted from his mind.

"Yes," replied the gentleman, complacently stroking his chin.

A sudden light broke over Herbert's countenance.

"I am most thankful to hear it," he exclaimed, with an air of interest. "When I left you this morning, I feared your resolution was unalterably fixed."

"So I thought," returned Mr. Snapson, shrugging his shoulders, and glancing meaningly at his son, who had rushed to Herbert's side directly they entered the room.

"Is it to you we are indebted for this concession?" said Herbert, regarding him with a look of affection.

"I asked papa to let the men have what they wanted," he replied, simply.

"Asked me!" repeated Mr. Snapson, apparently amused at the expression. "If my memory serves me correctly, you did more than that. Would you believe it, Mr. Seymour, he insisted on collecting all the money he could find, and——"

"Only my own, papa," observed Albert, parenthetically.

"And, unless I had prevented him by agreeing to grant the demands of my refractory workmen, he would have distributed it amongst them, besides promising to hand over all his pocket-money to them, so long as they remained out of employment."

Herbert leaned forward, and silently pressed his lips to the boy's upturned forehead.

"You never did that before," cried Albert, throwing his arms impulsively around his neck; "why should you do it now?"

Herbert smiled; and Mr. Snapson, scarcely knowing whether to view this trifling demonstration with gratification or jealous suspicion, continued his explanation by saying impressively,—

"You see, therefore, that I was to a certain extent constrained to submit to these unreasonable impositions."

"Do you still consider them unreasonable?" questioned Herbert, in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

"Well, perhaps the less we say on that subject the better," returned Mr. Snapson, more cheerfully.

"We must not forget the men," remarked Albert, laying his hand

remindingly upon Mr. Snapson's arm; "Greyson said they would be going to their homes in half an hour."

"You are right," replied the gentleman; and, turning quickly to Herbert, he told him of Mr. Greyson's proposition, and inquired if he would object to accompany them to the factory.

"By no means," said Herbert, instantly rising from his seat; "it would be difficult to over estimate the pleasure I shall feel at being privileged to witness so happy a termination to an affair whch might have resulted in unpleasant consequences to all parties."

As he spoke thus, Mr. Snapson's eyes were fastened on him with an expression of eager and thoughtful attention.

His cold and cautious temperament rendered him remarkably slow in recognising (much less appreciating) the worth of another; and the idea of any one being actuated by a purely disinterested motive was, in his opinion, a mere fantastical dream—without existence or foundation.

But Herbert's conduct puzzled him exceedingly. *He* could have no ulterior object in desiring so ardently to bring about a good understanding between himself and his *employés*; and in spite of his propensity for mistrusting appearances, and putting the worst construction upon everything which did not coincide with *his* prejudiced judgment, Mr. Snapson's respect for Herbert was greatly increased by the unmistakable anxiety he evinced in arranging a matter so little affecting his own interests.

CHAPTER LVI.

NEW REGULATIONS ESTABLISHED.

"Wake, thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers,
Lest these lost years should haunt thee on the night
When death is waiting for thy numbered hours
To take their swift and everlasting flight;
Wake, ere the earth-born charm unnerve thee quite,
And be thy thoughts to work divine addressed;
Do something—do it soon with all thy might:
An angel's wing would droop, if long at rest,
And God Himself, inactive, were no longed blessed."

MR. GREYSON'S first impulse, on reaching the factory, was to make a tour of investigation through its several departments, in order to ascertain—so far as a *coup-d'œil* would permit—the present state of the men's feelings towards their employer.

This he did; but nothing, either in their appearance or manner, indicated aught concerning the subject just then uppermost in his mind, until he chanced to point out something which he wished to have attended to on the following day.

Then he remarked that several of the men paused in their work, and, lifting their heads, exchanged a brief, but expressive glance with each other; while a smile, full of significant meaning, quivered over their toil-worn faces.

"Ah! I thought so!" muttered Mr. Greyson as he shut himself up in his office—a small, dingy-looking room, entirely devoid of any superfluities in the shape of furniture (a desk, two chairs, and large oaken press being the sole contents); "I scarcely know how I could have managed had I not been so ably supported by that extraordinary lad."

Thus saying he seated himself at his desk, and opening a cumbrous ledger, hastily proceeded to make several entries in it; after which, he took a few restless turns through the contracted apartment, and finally stationed himself close to the window, from whence he would receive the quickest intimation of Mr. Snapson's approach.

He had not waited long, when he descried him at a distance, coming slowly towards the factory, accompanied by Herbert (*Albert*, who entirely disapproved of their tardiness, was several yards ahead); and instantly summoning the person whose duty it was, Mr. Greyson desired him to make the usual signal for assembling the men in the spacious quadrangle of the building.

His order was executed so promptly, that before the astonished workmen had time to speculate on the cause of their being thus hurriedly collected, or ask a single question, th ey found themselves in the presence of their unpopular employer.

"What brings the master here, Dan?" whispered a rubicund little man, whose smallness of stature enabled him to see Mr. Snapson, but *not* Herbert. "I'll bet you a shilling he has found out everything,

and comes to give us our dismissal of his own accord. It's just like him—he's far too proud to———"

"Peace, fool!" interrupted our friend Mortice, looking down upon his diminutive companion with an expression of supreme contempt; "Mr. Seymour is here, too."

"Ah, I didn't know that. I wonder——"

"*Will* you hold your tongue?" said Mortice, giving him an admonitory tap on the head; "he is going to speak."

"Who?" persisted the little man, pulling at his jacket.

"Hush! Mr. Seymour, of course."

And he leant forward with intense eagerness, to hear what Herbert would say.

"My friends," observed our hero, a pleasant light shining in his deep dark eyes, "Mr. Snapson has deputed me to inform you, that at the special request of his son"—pointing smilingly to Albert—"he engages to make the following alterations and modifications in the existing factory regulations."

Here Herbert proceeded to recapitulate the different points which had been the original ground of controversy, and concluded by expressing his own heartfelt delight at this agreeable ending to a matter so nearly affecting the welfare and prosperity of themselves and their families, and suggested that if they clearly comprehended the extent of the concession Mr. Snapson had agreed to, and acquiesced in the specified arrangements, they might, to obviate any misconception or future discordancies, give that gentleman a verbal assurance of their satisfaction.

For a short time after he had ceased speaking, the men consulted each other's faces, but said nothing.

To Mr. Greyson, this pause seemed ominous—to Mr. Snapson, simply incredible; whilst Herbert, so far from being surprised or apprehensive, felt rather pleased at their apparent deliberation.

"A promise hastily made is soon broken," he remarked in an undertone to Mr. Snapson, on observing how thunderstruck he appeared at the hesitation of his subordinates; "I look upon it as a good omen that they should seriously revolve the *pros* and *cons* in their minds, previous to committing themselves."

"Committing themselves!" repeated Mr. Snapson, in profound astonishment; "really one would suppose that the obligation was on *my* side instead of theirs."

"We must have patience, papa," said Albert, touching him on the arm; "I think they are pleased."

"I think so too," replied Herbert, eagerly scrutinising the countenances of those nearest himself.

"Look at that huge man who is elbowing his way through the crowd, Mr. Seymour," cried Albert, in some excitement; "what is he going to do?"

"Ah, I see him," said Herbert, with a smile; adding in a whisper, "they have elected him as their spokesman, I suspect."

"Well, Mortice," he exclaimed, raising his voice, and advancing a step or two to meet him; "what is your final decision?"

"We wish to thank Mr. Snapson for his promise," said Mortice—in no wise abashed by the stern severity of that gentleman's gaze—"and to say, that under the circumstances, we are willing to retain our old places in the factory."

"Under the circumstances, indeed!" muttered Mr. Snapson, setting his lips fiercely together; "the low-born rascal! does he expect to impose on me?"

But Herbert, who could better understand their struggles, and knew how to address himself to their capabilities, answered good-naturedly,—

"You are right, my friends—quite right! A rolling stone, as you have often heard, gathers no moss!"

Mr. Snapson was at a loss to account for the sudden lighting up of many weather-beaten faces at this repetition of a homely proverb; or the respectfulness of Mortice's manner, as he responded, with an awkward attempt at a bow,—

"We also wish to offer *you* our grateful thanks, sir, for all the trouble you have had——"

"Don't mention that," said Herbert, earnestly; "as I observed before, you owe everything, not to me, but to Mr. Snapson's own son."

"Three cheers for the young squire!" cried a voice at the other end of the quadrangle; and instantly the words were taken up and echoed by every individual present, with a heartiness and energy peculiar to Englishmen, until the building rang again with the loud and prolonged cheering that followed.

This sudden and unexpected demonstration produced a complete revolution in the mind of Mr. Snapson.

The sweetest music he had ever heard was harsh and unharmonious when compared with the spirited vociferations that now greeted Albert —or, rather, *himself*, through his son; and as the deafening cheer burst again and yet again, from those stentorian voices, his rigid features unbent—their sharp, suspicious, and aceric expression changing into the nearest approach to gentleness and amiability which they were perhaps capable of assuming; while his thin lips wore a complacent smile, and his keenly inquisitive eyes seemed for the moment to be gleaming with sensibility.

"My son thanks you for this proof of your cordial feelings toward him," he said, lifting his hand as the last cheer died away; "and, for my own part, I assure you that I am happy to have had the power of benefiting you."

This was unquestionably true—*pro tem.*

"I suppose we *ought* to get up a cheer for *him*," muttered Daniel Mortice, dubiously scratching his head; but the fact is, I don't much like——"

"Never mind your likings, Daniel," said Herbert, who happened to overhear his soliloquy; "it is always better to do what is right, without waiting to consult our own inclination."

"Do you think this is necessary, sir?" asked the man in a suppressed and irresolute tone.

"Nay, I would rather not interfere," replied Herbert, turning smilingly away: "though there can be no harm in reminding you that he might have refused his son's request, had he felt so disposed."

"That's true," ruminated Mortice: "well, I suppose it'll have to be. Here, my boys," he added, lifting his rugged voice, "let's give a cheer for the master."

"A cheer for the master!" was repeated on all sides and, though neither so loud nor so long as the others, Mr. Snapson was in no mood

for finding fault with it when it came. Indeed, I scarcely imagine he detected any difference; and if he *had* done so, he would have attributed it to another cause than the actual one.

"Now, papa, shall we finish up with three cheers for Mr. Seymour?" cried Albert, anticipating the workmen's next move.

"I was about to make the same proposition," replied Mr. Snapson, with amazing cordiality; "I will myself lead you off!"

Which he did, to the unbounded surprise of every one, not excepting Herbert, who could hardly credit the evidence of his senses at this unwonted stretch of politeness on the part of his stiff and sometimes uncourteous neighbour.

He (Herbert) briefly responded to the enthusiastic acclamations which the mere mention of his name had called forth, and then moved hastily aside, as if afraid to trust himself to say another word.

"Here," exclaimed Albert, in a quick excited whisper to Mr. Greyson, who stood immediately behind him; "as soon as we are gone, give them this, and tell them to go and drink our——"

"No, no," eagerly interposed Herbert, arresting the boy's hand, as he was forcing the before alluded-to bank-note upon the perplexed manager; "don't encourage them to do that, Albert."

"Why not?" he demanded a little petulantly; "I want them to enjoy themselves."

"There would be no true enjoyment in what you propose," rejoined Herbert, impressively; "on the contrary, it might be made the means of doing some of these warm-hearted follows incalculable harm."

"Harm?" echoed the boy, as he held the bank-note suspended between his finger and thumb, and twisted himself round in order to obtain a clearer view of Herbert's face.

"Yes," pursued the latter; "I should be sorry indeed if you were to tempt them to revisit scenes which they have of late abandoned."

"What can I do with this, then?" questioned the lad, glancing ruefully at the money; "how else could they spend it?"

"I'll tell you an idea that has sometimes occurred to me," replied Herbert, after a moment's reflection; "but as it is as yet very unformed, you must promise me not to speak of it until I give you leave."

"Make haste and let me know what it is," said Albert, evasively, and by way of emphasizing his request he impatiently seized the young man's hand in both his own.

Herbert smiled at his eagernes, and stooping down lest he might be overheard, he resumed,—

"I should like, if it could be managed, to invite them all—men women, and children too—to tea one evening, say next week, or the week after, and then——"

"Ah, *that* will be jolly!" exclaimed Albert, in an ecstasy of delight. "Managed!" he repeated thoughtfully, "of course it can be managed! Will it cost much, Mr. Seymour? because I have lots more money."

"Oh, no," said Herbert greatly amused at the air of naive importance he always felt bound to assume. "Besides, my friend Sir Edward Stanley is ever ready to afford me practical assistance on these occasions, and having both the will and power, *his*—— but what is trou-

bling you, dear Albert?" he asked, patting him kindly on the head, as he observed that the boy's nostrils began to quiver with suppressed emotion; "you shall help too."

"Oh, I fancied you were going to do it all yourself, and that would be *very* unkind," said Albert, quite reanimated by this assurance. "Where shall we have the tea?"

"I scarcely know yet," returned Herbert; "I did think of the large shed where we hold our meetings, but it would hardly accommodate them all, I fear."

"Oh, I have it!" cried Albert, gleefully rubbing his thin hands together. "Papa, papa," rushing up to him, without paying the slightest attention to our hero's earnest remonstrances; "Papa," he repeated for the third time, "I want you to grant me a favour!"

CHAPTER LVII.

ALBERT'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

"How difficult you will find it to convince a miserly *heart* that anything is good which is not profitable!"—*Sterne's Sermons.*

"*There* are none of selfish mind,
There are none of hearts unkind,
There are none inflamed with pride,
There are none who step aside.

There are none to lord it o'er
God's redeemed and humble poor;
Every shred of priestly pride
Sinks into oblivion's tide."

Lays of the Future.

"A FAVOUR!" re-echoed Mr. Snapson, glancing surreptitiously at the manager, with whom he had been conversing; "are you not yet satisfied, my boy?"

"No, papa; but I shall be if you will agree to this little request," said Albert, coaxingly.

"H'm," replied his father, eyeing him dubiously; "you must first explain your meaning."

"You know it will be my birthday to-morrow," commenced the lad, and then he stopped for want of breath.

"Ah! I had positively forgotten that important fact," exclaimed Mr. Snapson, with the smile which he rarely accorded to any one else.

"And I want you to give these men a holiday," continued the boy, rapidly.

Mr. Snapson contracted his brows.

"And let *me* provide them with a comfortable tea," added Albert, ignoring this token of dissatisfaction.

"Tea!" ejaculated Mr. Snapson, simultaneously raising his hands and eyes in the purest astonishment; "what new-fangled scheme is this?"

"Be quick and decide, papa," was his son's irrelevant answer. "Mr. Greyson is signalling the men to retire; and unless I speak at once they will be gone."

"But I cannot understand your object, Albert," remonstrated the gentleman.

"O papa!"

"And even if I did both comprehend and approve of it, I do not see how it could be properly carried out."

"I'll manage that," returned Albert, excitedly; "if I have your leave, it's all I want."

Mr. Snapson looked perturbed.

"There seems no end to his whims," he muttered, *sotto voce*. "I scarcely know what is coming over the lad."

"May I do it, papa?" persisted Albert, in happy unconsciousness of the rebellious state of his father's feelings at this fresh act of interference. "It will be a far better way of spending my money than letting the men drink it away at the public-house."

Mr. Snapson stared aghast.

"What an alternative!" he remarked, with a sickly smile; adding, after a momentary pause of consideration, "I will ask Mr. Seymour's opinion." And hastily moving to Herbert's side, he briefly repeated Albert's desire.

"I don't half understand it," he said, slightly shrugging his shoulders; "but I hardly like refusing him anything on his birthday. If, therefore, you consider it a feasible scheme, I shall place no obstacles in the way of its being carried out."

"There will be very little time for making our preparations," replied Herbert, shaking his head half reproachfully at Albert; "but I have no doubt we can manage it."

"I can't say that I approve of this system of giving holidays," pursued Mr. Snapson, discontentedly.

"Just for once, papa," pleaded Albert.

"The afternoon will be quite sufficient," rejoined Herbert.

"Ah, yes," assented the gentleman, in obvious relief, "of course it will."

"I don't think so," interposed the impetuous boy.

"Hush, Albert!" said our hero, lowering his voice; "we cannot reasonably ask for more."

"Well, you know best, I suppose," he replied in a subdued tone.

"Here, Greyson," exclaimed Mr. Snapson, beckoning to the manager, will you be good enough to inform the men that to-morrow being the anniversary of my son's birthday, he wishes them to leave a few hours earlier than usual, and intends providing them with a tea in the evening. By the bye," he added, turning to Herbert, "*where* is this novel kind of entertainment to be partaken of."

Before he could reply, Albert cried out,—

"Why should it not be here?"

"Here!" repeated Mr. Snapson, glancing doubtingly around.

"Yes; it is far larger than the shed, isn't it, Mr. Seymour?"

Herbert gave an affirmative nod.

"And then, you know, we could quite easily get it furnished."

"A few tables and forms are all we require," Herbert hastened to say, as he saw the shadow that came to Mr. Snapson's face at the thought of this additional expense, "and these I can easily borrow for the occasion."

Mr. Snapson's countenance brightened, though he made no verbal response to the young man's offer, but, taking his arm, began to move away from the building, leaving Mr. Greyson to make what communication he thought proper to the workmen.

Albert lingered behind for the purpose—as he observed on rejoining them—of explaining that it was not only the men he wanted, but also their wives and families!

"What on earth do you want of them?" inquired Mr. Snapson, brusquely; "they will add considerably to the trouble——"

"O papa, the party would be very incomplete without them."

"Oh, if that is your idea, I need say no more," returned the gentleman, in a tone of affected indifference; but a certain drawing in of

the upper lip showed that, while tacitly consenting to the arrangement, he was far from approving of it. "I fear, however," he continued, discouragingly, "that you have recklessly undertaken more than you will be able to accomplish."

Albert looked up at him in astonishment.

"How, papa?" he asked.

"You have no conception of the difficulty of satisfying those rough and uncivilized creatures, my boy. If they possessed a spark of proper feeling or respect for their superiors, it would be another thing; but as a class they seem to be utterly devoid of gratitude."

"Are you not judging them rather harshly?" inquired Herbert, trying to hide a smile.

"To you it may perhaps appear severe; but during the whole of my long intercourse with their kind, I have never found cause to alter my opinion."

"Do you see no redeeming traits in their character?" said the young man, stealing a furtive glance at the cold and impressible features of his strange companion.

"None!" was the reply, uttered with gloomy decision.

Herbert walked on for a short distance in thoughtful silence, scarcely knowing how to pursue the subject without giving Mr. Snapson offence.

Presently the latter remarked in a lighter tone,—

"Albert seems to take it for granted that you will afford him the benefit of your assistance on this occasion."

Herbert bowed.

"But as his demands are often most exorbitant," continued the indulgent father, "I hope you will unhesitatingly refuse——"

"O papa! we could not get on at all without Mr. Seymour," eagerly interposed Albert, who felt quite appalled at the idea of embarking in such an important enterprise alone.

"You forget that he has many other demands upon his time, my boy, and it may be inconvenient——"

"Ah, but he will *make* time for this, won't you?"—coming round to Herbert's side, and looking confidingly up in his face.

"Certainly," he answered, with an affectionate smile; "I should regret it extremely, were I obliged to absent myself from such an interesting ceremony."

"I wish we could think of some way of amusing them," observed Albert, reflectively.

"A hopeless task, that," ejaculated Mr. Snapson.

"Now, papa, it is a positive shame for you to abuse them so," cried Albert, with more warmth than filial respect.

"I have no intention of abusing them," said his father, slightingly; "they are not worth the trouble."

"After their handsome behaviour, too," added the plain-spoken lad. "I was perfectly amazed at their cheering us so lustily."

"I admit that so far they acted well," responded Mr. Snapson, his mind reverting with evident complacency to that part of their performance.

"And then, you know, it was quite undeserved."

"How undeserved?" peremptorily questioned the gentleman, a sudden flash reddening his cheek, and a stern, defiant light flashing from his eyes.

"Why, there can't be a doubt that the poor fellows have been very badly used," explained Albert, without detecting these indications of incipient anger; "*rightfully*, they ought to have got what they wanted ages ago."

"You are wandering from your subject," said Herbert, intuitively comprehending the state of Mr. Snapson's feelings, and wishing to prevent him from making a disagreeable retort.

"Am I?" replied the boy, in all simplicity.

"You were talking of amusement," continued Herbert, with a smile; "would a magic lantern prove sufficiently attractive?"

"Capital!" cried Albert, eagerly; "have you got one?"

"I have, or rather Sir Edward Stanley has—for, properly speaking, it belongs to him."

"And would he lend it?" asked Albert, in his quick, undeliberating fashion.

"Oh, certainly. You can see the apparatus now, if you like—it is in my study. Would you care"—turning to Mr. Snapson—"to examine it? There are several peculiarities in its construction which I have observed in no other."

"Does that render it more difficult to work?" inquired the gentleman, as they walked up the neat footpath together.

"No; when once understood, it is quite simple—more so, I imagine, than the common kind."

Thus saying, Herbert opened the door of the cottage, and his visitors found themselves again in his quiet little study.

Half an hour passed away before Albert's curiosity was fully satisfied. Then Mr. Snapson started up, professing himself greatly amazed at finding it so late; and, after inviting Herbert to return with them to dinner, and receiving in reply an assurance that he was expected elsewhere, he took leave of him with the utmost cordiality and respect.

The following day was one of unremitting exertion for Herbert. So many preparations had to be made in so short a time that it seemed at first useless attempting it; and, but for his promptitude and energy, it would have been impossible to get things suitably arranged for the evening's entertainment.

Albert wandered about in the most restless and excited frame of mind, dragging his unfortunate brother hither and thither, without the slightest regard to his personal comfort or convenience, until the poor young man, tormented by his strange caprices, and almost driven distracted by his fanciful suggestions and whimsical freaks, suddenly stopped in their twentieth walk to the factory, whither they were going merely for the purpose of asking Herbert an unnecessary question, and positively refused to stir another step.

"It is absurd!" he exclaimed, in a voice which showed that his quiescent nature was roused at length; "I have no patience with you, Albert!"

"What is absurd?" demanded the lad, his widely opened eyes expressing nothing but sheer astonishment at the idea of his impassive brother assuming such a decisive tone.

"I have not had a moment's peace the whole day," resumed Henry, indignantly; "and as for *you*, why you have worked yourself into a perfect fever of excitement, and all for what? just for the sake of these stupid workmen."

Albert continued to gaze at him for several seconds, with that sort of wonder we might be supposed to feel in looking at some rare kind of animal presented to our view for the first time. But presently, wonder was exchanged for anger, and the hot blood rushed into his cheek as he cried out vehemently,—

"I don't love you, Henry; I will never love you more!"

"Nonsense, Albert," said Henry, startled by this unexpected outburst; "I had no intention of vexing you."

"What right have you to speak of them in that sneering way?" retorted the boy (quite overlooking the blame offered to himself, in his zeal for the men); "they are *not* stupid!"

"Well, well, there is no occasion for us to quarrel about it," returned his brother, soothingly; "I only used that term to show how little importance——"

"*They* are when compared to ourselves," shrewdly interpolated Albert.

"Just so," answered Henry, forcing a laugh; "you surely cannot deny that the susceptibilities of such——"

"I don't know what you mean when you begin to talk of susceptibilities," said Albert, abruptly; "but if you had heard the hearty way they cheered us yesterday, simply because papa promised to give only what is just and right, you would not perhaps speak so slightingly of them. Mr. Seymour's opinion is very different from yours, and I suspect he knows better than either of us."

"Yes; *he* is the pattern of all excellence," returned Henry, with a significant shrug.

(Mr. Snapson was not the only one who felt jealous of the influence Herbert had unconsciously acquired over the spirited lad.)

"Well, I can't wait any longer," replied Albert, in a subdued tone; "if you don't choose to come with me, I must go alone."

And he began to move forward.

"Stay," cried Henry, casting a half-frightened glance around him; "as you appear resolved on going, I suppose I had better accompany you."

"Not unless you like," said Albert, quickly. "Oh, there is papa coming," he added, with a conscious smile, as he discovered the reason of Henry's wavering; "but" (here he unwittingly gives one an insight into the exquisite generosity of his disposition) "if he asks why you left me, I will make an excuse."

"All right," said Henry, taking him by the hand, and moving on towards the factory; "having come so far, we may as well proceed."

CHAPTER LVIII.

SUMMARY MEASURES TO PREVENT INFECTION.

"What are riches? Hoarded treasures
May, indeed, thy coffers fill;
Yet, like earth's most fleeting pleasures,
Leave thee poor and heartless still.

What are hopes, but gleams of brightness
Dancing darkest clouds between?
Or foam-crested waves, whose whiteness
Gladdens ocean's darksome green.

What are fears? Grim phantoms, throwing
Shadows o'er the pilgrim's way,
Every moment darker growing,
If we yield unto their sway." BERNARD BARTON.

"Take nothing upon trust, but all upon trial."

QUITE late in the evening, Mr. Snapson, at Albert's earnest entreaty, paid a fleeting visit to the quadrangle; and the scene which there met his astonished vision was well calculated to leave a lasting impression upon his mind.

As he glanced around him, he could not help being struck with the perfect order and harmony that prevailed: the quiet yet unconstrained demeanour of each individual present—all dressed in their holiday attire, and wearing their happiest and most atractive smiles, in honour of the occasion.

For a moment his heart expanded, and he felt sorry that he had never before tried the experiment of treating his workmen with kindness and conciliation, instead of assuming towards them an air of iron reserve, and endeavouring, by harsh and rigorous measures, to subjugate them to his will.

I say *almost*, because his understanding was of that *calibre* which disqualified him from shaking off any long-established prejudice, or forgetting that he was the *master*, *they* the servants; neither could he quite forgive the method they had adopted to induce him to yield to their demands.

Still, his natural shrewdness and intelligence told him that he ought to be satisfied with the result of the negotiation, and thankful that his first resolution had been set aside.

It is worthy of remark that, although Mr. Snapson ceased from henceforth to place obstacles in the way of his son's personal intercourse with Herbert, he seemed particularly desirous of preventing him from evincing any further interest in the fortunes of his dependants; and when he discovered that, instead of being content with merely visiting Herbert at his own cottage, Albert insisted also on accompanying him in his walks, and was consequently his frequent companion in his periodical visitations among the poor and destitute, he was excessively irritated and annoyed.

Years before, he had determined that his son, from whom he

hoped and expected such great things, should have no connection whatever with the factory.

So long (this was Mr. Snapson's fixed resolve) as Albert remained a minor, he would carry on the business, and allow the money thus gained to swell the fortune already accumulated; but directly the youth should attain his majority, it was his intention to remove him from all these associations, and set up an establishment for him, on a scale of magnificence unsurpassed by even the wealthiest members of England's aristocracy.

Visions, too, of future greatness rose before the eyes of the ambitious father; and various wild and chimerical ideas, regarding the probable elevation of the Snapson family to rank and dignity, ever and anon floated through his brain.

"But how can all this be accomplished?" Such was the question he asked himself one day, as he sat in his library, mentally surveying the condition of that illustrious lineage, past, present, and prospective. "How *can* it be accomplished if Albert continues to identify himself with these low-born individuals, and——"

Here Mr. Snapson's reflections were suddenly broken in upon by the loud sound of the dinner-gong, and before its echoes had died away he rose hastily from his seat, and went in search of his wife.

His face still wore a cloudy and anxious look as he entered the dining-room and took his place at the bottom of the table.

"Where is Albert?" was the first abrupt query, on observing that the lad was not present.

"I suppose he will be with Mr. Seymour," replied Henry, to whom the question had been addressed.

"And why are you not with him?" crossly demanded his step-father. "I strongly disapprove of the way you have of allowing him to wander about alone, rather than take the trouble of going with him."

"It would be no trouble," said Henry, with some bitterness; "but as he seems to prefer Mr. Seymour's society——"

"And why *should* he?" sternly pursued Mr. Snapson, without allowing him to finish his sentence. "It would be more natural, I should think, for him to choose the companionship of his brother rather than that of a comparative stranger."

Henry bit his lip, but ventured no reply.

"Albert is growing very wilful of late, my dear," mildly interposed Mrs. Snapson.

"Wilful!" repeated her husband, with an uneasy frown; "you strangely misjudge the boy; he is one of the gentlest——"

"Of course I am only alluding to his unaccountable attachment to Mr. Seymour," returned the lady quickly; "it passes my comprehension to understand what pleasure a lad of Albert's ardent and lively disposition can find in such grave society."

"It *is* remarkable!" emphasised Mr. Snapson, partially mollified; "I have often wondered at it myself. But," glancing reprovingly at Henry, "it is greatly *your* fault, sir."

"My fault!" mechanically reiterated the young man.

"If you took proper pains to render yourself agreeable to your brother, he would not wish to throw you over for any one else."

"Really, one would think Henry was a poodle dog," muttered Arabella, for the benefit of the table-cloth.

Apparently something in her face aroused Mr. Snapson's suspicions, though he did not catch her words; for fixing his eye sternly on her face, he asked pointedly,—

"What is the matter with *you*, Arabella?"

"Nothing," she answered, warned by a look from her mother.

"Pray don't put on that discontented face, then," said Mr. Snapson, with asperity.

Before Arabella could frame a reply, the door was ceremoniously opened by an obsequious footman, and Albert came and sat down in his accustomed place at Mr. Snapson's right hand.

"You are late," observed his father, after ordering the servant to bring back one of the dishes, which he had just removed.

"It is all Mr. Seymour's fault!" exclaimed the boy, in a quick, impatient voice.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Snapson, not ill-pleased at the prospect of hearing that the two had at last fallen out.

"Several times lately," continned Albert, waxing warm, "I have begged him to let me go with him to see poor little Samuel Mortice, who is ill with scarlet fever; but he always put me off, sometimes making one excuse, and sometimes another. Well, I made up my mind that I *would* see him to-day, whether Seymour wished it or not; so, after calling at the cottage, and finding him out, I went off by myself to Colton.

Thus far Mr. Snapson had sat rigid and immovable, listening with breathless suspense to every word. *Now* his face blanched up to the roots of his hair, while the perspiration stood in cold beads on his forehead. He attempted to speak, but his parched throat gave utterance to no sound; and the utmost he could do was to reach forth his hand for a glass of wine, which he drank as eagerly as if his very life depended upon it.

Meanwhile Albert, without dreaming of waiting to note the effect of his communication, resumed,—

"Well, I reached Mortice's house——"

Here Arabella, with a frightened glance at her mother, began to move her own chair a little away from Albert's.

"And then, what do you think?" added the boy, indignantly; "some one came behind me, and clutched me, just as if I had been a thief! and when I turned round to discover who it was that treated me so disrespectfully, I found myself in his grasp."

"Whose?" inquired Mrs. Snapson, with an agitation scarcely less than that of her husband.

"Why *his*—Seymour's, of course. The more I struggled to get away from him, the firmer he grasped me; and not until he had fairly dragged me about three hundred yards from the spot would he open his lips to explain what he meant by being so rude to me."

"Then you did not enter the infected house after all," said Arabella, drawing a long breath of satisfaction.

"No," he answered rather shortly; "Mr. Seymour took care of that; for when I told him I would try again to-morrow, he coolly observed that it would be quite useless, as he had given Mrs. Mortice strict injunctions not to allow me to enter her door. Just as if I were a baby!" he monologised, with an air of offended dignity; "I never could have believed *he* would treat me so shamefully!"

Mr. Snapson tossed off another glass of wine in infinite relief.

"My dear Albert," he said, recovering himself by a great effort, "instead of blaming Mr. Seymour, you ought to be most thankful to him for preventing you from running such a terrible risk."

"I don't believe there would have been the least danger, papa," returned Herbert, carelessly; "besides——"

"You should consider others as well as yourself, my dear," interposed Mrs. Snapson, gravely, her motherly anxieties aroused at the idea of the havoc which this dread disease might create in her nursery. "To put the best construction upon your conduct, it was very thoughtless."

"Why, what harm?" began Albert, surprised at the unwonted severity of her manner.

"*Great* harm!" she exclaimed, energetically; "you might have been the cause of your little sister's death!"

"O mamma!" he said, looking completely awed, "do you think so?"

"What is the use of reminding him of that?" asked Mr. Snapson, glancing reproachfully at his wife.

"Because, whatever *your* opinion may be," she replied with an irrepressible burst of indignant feeling, "*I* consider *their* lives quite as valuable as *his!*"

The red flush of anger spread itself over Mr. Snapson's countenance as she spoke thus; but apparently he thought it better to allow it to pass without comment, for he offered no reply.

Albert, however, who always took everything quite literally, promptly responded,—

"Of course they are, mamma; we all know that."

"Do we?" said Arabella, in a low-breathed aside to Henry; "I don't for one!"

"Come, Arabella, we will adjourn to the drawing-room," remarked Mrs. Snapson, assuming her most dignified deportment; "we can hear the remainder of Albert's account some other time."

And whatever might have been the young lady's own wishes, she was obliged to submit to her mother's decision.

After they were gone, Mr. Snapson again reverted to the subject, and questioned his son closely regarding Herbert's motive for wishing to deter him from entering Mortice's dwelling.

When he had satisfied himself on this point, and extracted a promise—which Albert gave with extreme reluctance—that he would make no further effort to visit the infected neighbourhood, he leant his elbow upon the back of one of the chairs, and continued for a considerable time pondering deeply.

At length he left the table, but instead of following Henry and Albert into the drawing-room, whither they had already repaired, he took up his hat, and sauntered into the park.

For a few minutes he wandered about in a vague and purposeless sort of way, scarcely knowing what path to take. Then he strode hastily forward until he reached the palings which divided the grounds of his own mansion from Herbert's humble abode; and, applying a key to one of the nearest entrance-gates, he found himself in his neighbour's garden.

The hall door was wide open, and Herbert stood on the threshold.

CHAPTER LIX.

MYSTERY.

"Peace, brother! be not over-exquisite
To cast the fashion of uncertain evils;
For grant they be so, while they rest unknown,
What need a man forestall his day of grief,
And run to meet what he would most avoid?
Or if they be but false alarms of fear,
How bitter is such self-delusion!" *Comus.*

"No accidents are so unlucky but that the prudent may draw some advantage from them; nor are there any so lucky but that the imprudent may turn to their prejudice." ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"You were going out," said Mr. Snapson, hesitating to enter.

"An hour hence will do quite as well," replied the young man, as he laid down his hat, and led the way to the drawing-room.

"I am afraid my young friend has been entertaining you with a lamentable account of my unceremonious treatment of him this morning," continued Herbert, seeing that Mr. Snapson seemed in an unusually silent humour; "I never saw him so angry before."

"The very thing I wish to allude to," observed the gentleman, rousing himself, and speaking quickly and earnestly; "I feel utterly incapable of expressing my gratitude to you for preventing him from running the risk of taking that terrible fever;" and he shuddered visibly.

"I simply did what you would do for me, were our positions reversed," rejoined Herbert, lightly; "I might have discovered a gentler method of effecting my purpose," he added, smiling at the remembrance of the morning's scene, "had there been time; but as it was, I felt quite justified in taking active measures to keep him out of harm's way."

"Indeed, you were perfectly right," eagerly responded Mr. Snapson; "*perfectly* right," he repeated; "it is impossible to say what direful consequences your promptitude may have averted."

Herbert did not exactly approve of this doctrine; but before he could reply, Mr. Snapson asked,—

"Is the child very ill?"

"Yes; I fear there is little hope of his recovery; two of his sisters are also laid up."

"What—with the fever?"

Herbert bent his head in token of assent.

Mr. Snapson looked troubled.

"Have you heard of any other cases?" he anxiously inquired.

"A few, but they are less dangerous."

"Do you think the disease is likely to spread?" was Mr. Snapson's next uneasy question.

"I trust not," said Herbert; "the weather is favourable, and—but,

after all," he proceeded in a changed tone, as it for the first time occurred to him that Mr. Snapson's concern arose solely from his anxiety regarding his own family, "there is little use in speculating on these subjects."

"Surely it is our duty to use every lawful means of preserving our own life and the lives of those connected with us?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Herbert, seriously; "still, we know that the manner, time, and place of our death are all unalterably fixed; and, therefore, no effort of ours can ward off the final stroke when it comes."

"Are you a fatalist?" questioned Mr. Snapson, gazing at him in evident astonishment.

"By no means; I simply believe what the Bible tells me."

"I should imagine that this principle, if generally adopted, would lead to much unjustifiable rashness and presumption—I mean in the way of adventuring one's self into danger."

"Would it not, on the other hand, have the effect of delivering us from great and unnecessary solicitude about the future?" inquired Herbert, quietly.

"Well, it may be so," answered Mr. Snapson, in a tone of very doubtful acquiescence.

"Regarding Albert, however," resumed Herbert, thoughtfully, "I am quite aware of the expediency of taking every precaution——"

"I think I ought to remove him from the neighbourhood for a short time," quickly interrupted the anxious father, with a slight constriction of his firm lip; "so long as he remains here he *will* go about as usual."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Herbert, rather hesitatingly.

"Would it be possible for me to induce *you* to accompany us for a few weeks to our town house?" asked Mr. Snapson, with marked cordiality.

"You are very kind," returned Herbert, smiling frankly; "but I could not possibly leave home just now."

"Albert would be so delighted," observed the other, in a pursuasory tone.

"Thank you," replied Herbert, mildly, but firmly; "for my own part, I shall miss *him* greatly; still I feel that it is my duty to remain where I am."

Seeing him thus resolved, Mr. Snapson ceased to urge him further, though he certainly wondered at his decision.

After a momentary pause, during which that gentleman appeared a little confused, he suddenly observed,—

"I seem to be forgetting the object of my visit."

"Had you any particular motive for calling?" asked Herbert, as he stopped.

"You may, perhaps, remember," continued Mr. Snapson, looking more and more embarrassed, "that a month or two since I refused an application which you made me through your servant, in respect to a vacant spot of ground situated midway between this and Colton. Since then I have come to the conclusion that, if you still wish to erect a place of worship there, I will withdraw the objections I formerly made to your doing so; only, however, on the express understanding" (this was added with unusual graciousness) "that instead of purchasing it, as you at first proposed, I shall be permitted the honour

of freely bestowing it for the purpose, and also have an opportunity of contributing towards the necessary funds for erecting the building."

"Excuse me," said Herbert, as soon as his astonishment would allow him to speak. "You must be mistaken; I never commissioned any one to address you on such a subject."

Mr. Snapson eyed him incredulously.

"By whose request, then," he asked, slowly emphasising his words, "did the person calling himself James Gordon apply to me for permission to build a small church or chapel upon my property?"

"James Gordon!" cried Herbert, in manifest doubt and bewilderment. "Are you sure it was him?"

"Quite. He made me a fair offer for the land; and, though he may not actually have *said* so, he certainly gave me plainly to understand that it was for you he acted."

"It is very extraordinary!" replied Herbert, after a moment's serious thought; "I can't deny having often *wished* that something of the kind could be attempted; but so far from authorising Gordon to purchase land, I dismissed the very idea as impracticable, without mentioning it to any one. Indeed, to be frank with you," he added ingenuously, "my means are too slender to justify me in commencing such an expensive undertaking; otherwise, I would most gratefully accept your kind offer."

"What could that man's motive be in coming to me!" ejaculated Mr. Snapson, scarcely knowing whether to feel most bewildered or annoyed at the strange position into which he had unwittingly thrust himself.

"We will ask him," replied Herbert, stretching out his hand and pulling the bell. "I cannot account for it."

"Will you request Mr. Gordon to step here?" he said to the servant who answered his summons.

Then, turning to Mr. Snapson, who appeared greatly astonished, he explained,—

"I ought to tell you that, although Gordon thinks proper to call himself my servant, he is, in reality, nothing of the kind."

"Indeed!" returned Mr. Snapson, in unfeigned amazement.

"He has, in fact, sufficient property of his own to render him quite independent of any help I could afford him; and merely resides here, and assists me with his help and advice, out of the purest and most devoted affection for myself."

"He must be a *rara avis* indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Snapson, a sceptical smile curving his lips.

"He is certainly a most original character," answered Herbert, smiling slightly; "but here he comes!"

"James," he observed, instantly resuming his gravity, "I have sent for you to unravel a little mystery, which neither Mr. Snapson nor myself can understand."

"What is it, sir?" asked Gordon, standing respectfully before them.

"It would appear that some time ago Mr. Snapson was applied to regarding the purchase of a certain piece of land belonging to him."

"Yes, sir," he said, without the slightest change of countenance, though he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the young man's lips.

"But as Mr. Snapson disapproved of the purpose for which this land was to be set apart, he declined to dispose of it."

"Yes, sir," said Gordon again, as calmly and carelessly as if he had nothing whatever to do with the matter.

"Need I say that it was *you* who asked for the land, James?" returned Herbert, pointedly.

"And led me to infer that Mr. Seymour had authorised you to do so," dryly interpolated Mr. Snapson.

"What could have been your meaning, my friend?" asked Herbert, kindly; "you know how ridiculous it would be for *me* to talk of building a church!"

"The chief difficulty consists in obtaining a suitable spot of ground," murmured Gordon, still trying to maintain a cool and unembarrassed air.

"That difficulty I hoped to obviate by offering Mr. Seymour the land you spoke of," remarked Mr. Snapson, bending on him a look of earnest scrutiny.

Gordon started forward a step, while an imperceptible smile skirted over his lips; but, speedily checking himself, he inquired in a quiet, business-like tone,—

"May I conclude that you are now satisfied with the terms I offered, and consent——"

"I never objected to your terms, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Snapson, somewhat shortly.

Here Herbert interposed.

"My dear James," he said, remonstratingly; "you seem to forget the land is not everything. Supposing, for instance, we were to accept Mr. Snapson's generous proposal, what then?"

"Then, sir, we would begin to build at once," returned he other, with energy.

"And the funds, where would they come from?" inquired Herbert, unable to repress a smile at this Utopian scheme.

"Well, sir," he answered (stooping to pick up some imaginary article from the carpet), "I did not apply to Mr. Snapson for the ground, until I was sure of having sufficient money to pay for it, and also to defray the expense of erecting the building."

Herbert looked grave, almost troubled, as he asked,—

"But where, James—from whom——" and stopped.

"I understand, sir," said Gordon, hurriedly; "but I am not at liberty to tell you the names of those who have subscribed the most largely on this occasion, as it was their earnest wish that the matter should be kept a secret from you until after the laying of the foundation-stone. That is why I applied to you, sir," turning to Mr. Snapson, "without my master's knowledge."

"I see," assented the manufacturer, in a tone of good-humoured condescension; "had I been aware of this, I need not have divulged your secret."

"Sooner or later it must have been known," returned Gordon, glancing wistfully at Herbert, who had fallen into a silent reverie.

"At all events you understand that the land is ready for you whenever you choose to claim it," remarked Mr. Snapson, with a complacent bend of his head.

"Thank you, sir; we shall be glad to do so without delay," was James Gordon's matter-of-fact answer.

"Very good," said the other, after surveying him from head to foot in a serio-comic manner; "I will be happy also to put my name

down for a subscription towards the building fund, before I leave this place for London."

"Do you think of going soon?" asked Herbert, coming out of his fit of abstraction.

"Yes, to-morrow, if it can be managed."

"Dear Albert," apostrophised Herbert, "we shall feel quite strange without his daily visits."

"Do you still refuse to accompany us?" inquired Mr. Snapson, with undisguised earnestness.

"I must," said the owner of the cottage, gravely shaking his head.

"Well, I shall endeavour to see you in the morning," observed Mr. Snapson, as he took leave of him; "meantime, you will be able to investigate the matter further."

"Pray accept my thanks for your kind and liberal offer!" warmly responded Herbert. "If my friend Gordon should succeed in convincing me that we may prudently accept it, I will leave him to settle the business in his own way."

"You cannot do better," returned Mr. Snapson, with a friendly shake of the hand; "he appears quite equal to the undertaking."

Rather an amusing interview took place between our hero and his devoted adherent after their visitor's departure.

Gordon first attempted to parry the close questions with which Herbert proceeded to ply him; then he tried evasion; but, finding at length that he was making no progress in satisfying the young man's doubts, he brought forward several papers containing estimates of the probable expenses connected with the erection of the building, and also a list of the various contributions he had already received.

"But this is all so complicated," said Herbert, after puzzling his brain over the figures; "everything seems to be involved in mystery."

"Mystery!" echoed Gordon, with a little twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"These blanks, for example, what do they mean?"

"Those blanks," observed Gordon, in a slow, deliberative manner, "are merely left to show—but if you will excuse me for a minute," he added, hastily sweeping the papers into a drawer; "I hear Sir Edward's carriage stopping at the gate, and, as the servant is out, I should like to open the door for him."

"One word before you go," exclaimed Herbert, just as he was leaving the room; "can you truthfully affirm that all this money has been freely and spontaneously given?"

"Indeed, I can, sir," answered Gordon, with heartfelt sincerity. "Every penny was bestowed most cheerfully."

"And by those who were able to afford it, James? otherwise——"

"Ah, sir, you are beginning to doubt me!" returned Gordon, almost reproachfully.

"Not so, James," said our hero, coming up to him, and laying his hand kindly upon his shoulder. "My only fear was lest your zeal should, in this instance, have outrun your discretion, and your love for me led you to forget what is due to yourself and others."

"I trust I shall never do that," replied Gordon.

And with a smile, full of deep and affectionate meaning, he hastened to admit Sir Edward Stanley.

Herbert's thoughts were fully employed, or he might have felt somewhat surprised at the length of time that elapsed between the

opening of the hall-door and the young baronet's coming into the room.

However, he made his *entrée* at last; but during the five minutes that he remained he appeared restless and excited.

This he accounted for by explaining that he was greatly pressed for time, and having delivered a few unimportant messages from his mother, and promised to call again next day, he grasped his friend's hand, and departed, without affording Herbert an opportunity of consulting him on the subject which just then occupied such a prominent place in his mind.

Gordon accompanied Sir Edward to the carriage, and, after waiting to see it roll away, he returned to the house, and taking up his own hat, sallied forth in order to transact business which required his immediate attention.

CHAPTER LX.

VISITORS AT THE PARK.

"The wicked man is a very coward, and is afraid of everything: of God, because He is his enemy; of Satan, because he is his tormentor; of God's creatures, because they, joining with their Maker, fight against Him; of himself, because he bears about him his own accuser and executioner. He may be secure, because he knows not what he hath to fear, or desperate through extremities of fear; but truly courageous he cannot be." HALL.

"'Tis evening! in yon lordly mansion
They sit alone, that silent pair;
United—yet so strangely severed!
Apart—and yet so near!" ANON.

AND now I must invite my readers to return with me to Mertonsville Park, in order that we may ascertain how it has fared with Mrs. Seymour during these long months of separation from her only and ardently loved son.

It is again evening—a fair spring evening; bright, and clear, and reposeful.

As we approach the mansion, we are unconsciously struck with the unbroken stillness that prevails, both within and without; but suddenly a change, almost magical in its effect, is produced by the numerous lights which gleam from the windows, and give to the whole building an air of cheerfulness and comfort.

We enter the now brilliantly illuminated hall, and pass on amidst marble pillars and statuettes, gilded mirrors, and valuable paintings, to one of the lofty sitting-rooms, the door of which stands slightly ajar.

Mr. and Mrs. Seymour are its only occupants. The former is leaning back in a softly cushioned chair, glancing over the columns of an evening paper—the latter occupies a low couch exactly opposite.

In one hand she holds a small ivory screen, for the purpose of protecting her cheek from the fire, while with the other she mechanically plays with her little favourite dog (the same which Charles Hastings had procured for her), whose satin pillow has been on an ottoman close beside her.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes have fled, and still they sit thus, without exchanging a word, or even directing a look one towards the other, the gentleman appearing wholly engrossed in his paper, the lady wrapt in her museful reflections.

Mr. Seymour's face seems to have undergone no perceptible alteration, save, perhaps, that there are firmer lines about his firm mouth, and a harder and sterner light in his eyes; but in that of Mrs. Seymour, the change is more marked. Instead of the gentle softness which was once so strongly impressed upon her countenance, it now wears an habitually troubled, careworn, and mistrustful

expression; and when she speaks, it is generally in a fretful and complaining tone.

An invincible barrier has arisen between herself and her husband; and though he, in his inordinate self-complacency, dreams not of the change, it is sufficiently evident to an intelligent observer, that, though she may, and does, *fear* him, she has long since ceased to love him.

She yields him every outward semblance of respect, simply because she has been accustomed to do so, though from a very different motive; and her uniform obedience to his wishes springs from the knowledge acquired by painful experience of her own weakness and his strength.

Presently a servant enters the room, and asks whether the dinner shall be served.

"No," says Mr. Seymour, in a quick, decided tone. "Or, stay," he added, a tide of recollection rushing over him; "perhaps you would rather *not* wait, my dear?" turning inquiringly to the lady.

"Just as you please," she answered coldly.

"Then we we will have it at once."

The man bowed respectfully, and retired.

Directly the bell rang, Mr. Seymour rose from his chair, and, laying aside the newspaper, advanced with formal politeness to conduct his wife to the dining-room.

When there, he started several topics of conversation, but he received little encouragement to proceed, Mrs. Seymour's responses being short, constrained, and often wide of the mark.

As soon as custom permitted, she left the table, and returned to the drawing-room, where her husband—after a moment's delay, for the purpose of giving an order to one of the servants—followed her.

Nearly half an hour passed, during which Mr. Seymour dozed in his chair, whilst his wife amused herself with the last new novel, when the attention of both was arrested by the unmistakable noise of a carriage stopping at the hall-door.

A white, scared look flitted over Mrs. Seymour's face, and she leaned back on her sofa, with closed eyes and colourless, quivering lips.

Her husband's voice aroused her—cool, pitiless, and determined—albeit perfectly polite:

"Now, my dear, I beg you will exert yourself and receive your guests at least with becoming dignity and composure."

A slight shiver ran through the poor lady's frame. She opened her eyes; flashed one glance of mingled pride and reproach at the calm statue who stood before her; stooped to recover the volume which in her agitation she had dropped on the carpet—and silently waited.

In less than a minute the door was opened, and two gentlemen were announced.

They were Reginald Grafton and Mr. Vernon!

"My dear uncle and aunt," exclaimed the former, coming forward with outstretched hands, and speaking in a tone of the utmost respect, "this is indeed a pleasure!"

"You have brought your friend, I see," remarked Mr. Seymour, after cordially welcoming him to Mertonsville.

"Yes; allow me, my dear aunt, to introduce him to your favourable

notice," replied Reginald, with great deference. "Mr. Vernon—my aunt, Mrs. Seymour."

A frigid bow was the lady's only acknowledgment, but not being gifted with peculiarly quick perceptions, it is to be feared that Mr. Vernon omitted to ascribe her coldness to its proper cause.

"You will be glad of some refreshment after your journey," said Mr. Seymour, wishing, by his own civility, to make up for any lack of warmth in his wife's manner; "we did not wait dinner for you, as you forgot to mention the exact time you expected to be here, but the servants have been requested to keep——"

"Pray do not ring," interposed Reginald, seeing that Mr. Seymour's hand was on the bell; "we have already dined."

"Are you sure?" questioned his uncle, looking doubtfully.

"Yes. We were detained for an hour at W——, where we met a friend of Vernon's, who persuaded us to dine with him. If my aunt, turning again to Mrs. Seymour, will give us a cup of tea, it is all we shall require."

"You can have it immediately," returned the lady, trying hard to maintain her composure.

"Oh, we are in no hurry," replied Reginald, bringing a chair close to her sofa, and proceeding, as a preliminary step towards propitiating herself, to make the acquaintance of Lisetta, her little canine favourite.

"What a beautiful creature!" he exclaimed, in accents of admiration. "Is it a King Charles' spaniel?"

"I suppose so, but I have never seen another like it."

"Nor I," said Reginald, stooping to caress it.

Suddenly, however, he drew his hand away, with a look of annoyance, as the "beautiful creature," notwithstanding its inherent gentleness of disposition, lifted its head, and made an angry snap at his finger, besides bestowing on him a series of dissatisfied snarls and other equally significant tokens of its desire to be for the future exempted from any similar marks of attention.

"Fie! Lisetta!" said its mistress, bending down so as to conceal the smile which came unbidden to her lips at such a decided proof of the animal's sagacity.

"I should scarcely have expected to find it so testy," said Reginald, forcing a laugh, though he evidently felt vexed.

Mrs. Seymour's answer was not calculated to restore his good humour.

"Oh, Lisetta is a very discriminating dog; she has her antipathies as well as her favourites."

"But why should she conceive an aversion for *me?*" questioned the young man, in a piqued tone.

"It would be difficult to say," replied Mrs. Seymour, shaking her head; "she has probably discovered that you are no friend to her species."

Reginald loudly repudiated the idea of his having any hostile feeling towards the canine race; but whatever may have been Mrs. Seymour's opinion of his sincerity, she did not consider it necessary either to retract or qualify her remark.

"You gave us to understand that your friend, Mr. Cleveland, would accompany you for a few days," observed Mr. Seymour, who entirely disapproved of the turn the conversation had taken.

"Ah, yes," said Reginald, casting down his eyes, and looking the very picture of confusion; "he fully intended doing so, only—only——"

"He received an unexpected summons to return home," exclaimed Mr. Vernon, who also appeared exceedingly red and embarrassed; "either his mother or father—I forget which—was taken suddenly ill, and he had no choice but to leave us."

"He desired us, however," continued Reginald, resuming his usual manner, "to thank you and my aunt for your kind invitation, and to tell you how greatly he regretted being unable to avail himself of it."

Having thus plausibly accounted for Mr. Cleveland's absence, both Reginald and his friend seemed particularly anxious to change the subject.

I need hardly say that their statement of the case was a totally false one; it being, in fact, their own despicable and ungentlemanly conduct (to use no stronger expression) which had shocked and disgusted their quondam companion, and led him, in a fit of generous indignation, to separate himself from their company, and declare his determination of holding no manner of intercourse with them for the future.

True, he had, during their short stay in Lanchester, been easily prevailed upon to accompany them to Herbert Cottage; but he was, at the time, in perfect ignorance of the relationship that existed between Reginald Grafton and our hero; neither did the former think it prudent to inform him of Herbert's name or position in society, much less explain that he was the discarded heir of Mertonsville!

Had he been aware of this, no power on earth could have compelled him to take part in such an extraordinary proceeding; for with all his faults—and they were neither few nor venial—he would have scorned to connive at a mean or dishonourable action.

Before he had been many minutes in Herbert's presence, however, Mr. Cleveland discovered all, and, while inwardly censuring himself for having been the dupe of his unscrupulous friend, and wishing he could with propriety extricate himself from his uncomfortable situation, he felt an intuitive conviction and deep, heartfelt admiration of the high moral worth and superior attainments of our hero's unselfish character.

This impression remained so strongly fixed upon his mind, that he penned a frank, manly letter to Mr. Seymour, in which he spoke of the visit he had unintentionally paid his son (without in any way alluding to Reginald Grafton), and candidly explained his reasons for declining an invitation to Mertonsville.

That letter never reached Mr. Seymour; for Reginald, suspecting Mr. Cleveland's purpose, and having bribed the porter whose business it was to convey the letters from the hotel to the post-office, it was delivered into his hands.

After reading it aloud, for Mr. Vernon's information as well as his own, and enjoying a boisterous laugh over its contents, Reginald Grafton committed it to the flames with a chuckle of gratification.

Hence the agitation which both young men evinced at the mere mention of Mr. Cleveland's name.

They knew they had destroyed his letter: so far, therefore, they were safe, but the very consciousness of their own guilt was sufficient

to render them uneasy, apart from the fear which constantly assailed them, lest Mr. Seymour should learn, from some other source, the real cause of Mr. Cleveland's non-appearance.

* * * * * * *

Shortly after tea, Mrs. Seymour framed an excuse for leaving them, and immediately *she* rose, Lisetta also (who seemed to possess a marvellous faculty of adapting itself most completely to the humours and caprices of its mistress, and instinctively to guess and sympathise with the peculiar feelings that influenced her) sprang from its cushion, and unhesitatingly followed her out of the room.

CHAPTER LXI.

WILLSON CARRIES HER POINT.

"I grant him . . . avaricious, false, deceitful,
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
That has a name."

"But, brother, let your reprehension
Run in an easy current, not o'er high,
Carried with rashness, or devouring choler;
But rather use the soft, persuading way."

BEN JONSON.

"Do you really mean to say, Browning——"

"*Mr.* Browning, if you please," interrupted Mr. Seymour's valet, with what he considered becoming dignity.

"I beg your pardon, *Mr. Browning* it ought of course to be," continued the upper housemaid, slightly tossing her head; "do you mean to tell us, Mr. Browning, that the master thinks of making *him* his heir?"

"What else can he intend?" demanded the valet, in a tone of sorrowful dismay; "why does he bring him here, unless——"

"It may be only a visit, you know."

"And then to see the cunning way he is acting," pursued Browning, in accents of indignation; "doing everything he can to insinuate himself into his uncle's good graces, and even trying to hoodwink my mistress, just as if *she* would ever get to like him," he muttered between his closed teeth—"the poor-spirited——"

"You had better take care," interposed the cautious housemaid, "or you may give him offence."

"Give him offence, indeed!" scornfully repeated Browning; "do you imagine I should care for that? I am not one of your mean, sneaking, time-serving kind of fellows, who are in the habit of knocking under to any one who happens to be in power! Not I! I hope I have too much self-respect for that!"

"Don't praise yourself, my friend," said the gentle voice of Mrs. Willson, as she at that moment entered the comfortably furnished servants' hall, and seated herself in a large leather-covered easy-chair, at one side of the fire; "we are none of us what we should be."

"I know that," replied Browning, in a softened tone, and with marked respect; "but I declare it makes me furious when I see the attempts Mr. Grafton is making to step into the young squire's place. It is all very well for Eliza,"—darting an angry look at the housemaid—"to talk; *she* never saw Mr. Herbert, and does not know——"

"Of course I know that it would be more natural and proper in every way for the master's own son to get the estate than his nephew," said Eliza, rather tartly.

"It's not exactly that." remarked Willson, sighing deeply; "*some* sons are a grief and shame to their parents——"

"Of course they are," interposed Browning, nodding his head in

token of approbation; "and this makes it all the more inexcusable on the part of Mr. Seymour treating his son as he has done."

"Hush, Browning!" said Willson, softly and entreatingly; "it does not become us to judge our neighbours. One day we shall all be judged according to our works: until then——"

"I should not like to stand in his shoes on that day," soliloquised Browning.

"I dare say not," assented Ursula, the cook, who, in the absence of Mr. Seymour's French *chef*, was considered rather an important personage in the establishment; "it would be no advantage, I assure you."

"Ah! how prone we are to overlook our own faults, while dwelling upon the failings of others!" murmured Willson, as she fixed her eyes meditatively upon the burning coals. "Not that I can bring myself to palliate his conduct," she went on, speaking apparently to herself; "still, Satan is strong, and we are weak, and were *we* tempted as I have no doubt *he* was tempted, our actions would probably have been the same as his."

"Saving your presence, Mrs. Willson, I don't believe it!" exclaimed Ursula, in a sharp, decided one.

"Don't believe what?" asked Willson, facing suddenly round.

"I don't believe there is another man in England who would turn his son out of doors simply because he wanted to do right. What is your opinion, Mr. Browning?"

"I quite agree with you," said Browning, politely handing her a chair, as he saw that she had finished the arrangement of a dish of confectionery which was intended to grace their own supper-table that evening.

"By the bye, didn't you have some words with the master about Mr. Herbert's room?" inquired Ursula, turning with an air of respectful interest to Willson.

"Words!" replied the old woman, thoughtfully. "No."

"Why, Eliza told me that he had ordered her to put Mr. Grafton into the blue-room."

"And so he did," interjected the upper housemaid.

"And that when you heard of it, you declared he should *not* have the young squire's room."

"And so she did!" again exclaimed Eliza.

A curious little smile rippled over Willson's placid face, but she made no reply.

"Well, I could never believe he could have the heart to put Mr. Reginald into *that* room," cried Browning, fairly horrified at the idea.

"Tell us how you managed to carry your point," said the old butler, glancing at Willson from beneath his rugged, grey eyebrows; "we all know that it's not easy acting contrary to the master."

"I never disputed his authority before," observed Willson, in a low, deprecating tone, as if she wished to make an excuse to her own mind for what she had done.

"Well, how did you manage?" impatiently persisted the old man.

"Why, I did nothing," she answered, rousing herself, on observing that they were all waiting for her to speak; "only when Eliza came to ask me for the key of the blue chamber, I could not help feeling indignant at the purpose for which she said it was to be used."

"I should think not, indeed!" cried Browning, energetically; "it was enough to provoke the patience of Job himself had he been alive."

"And then?" asked the butler, signing to the impulsive valet to be silent.

"I determined that if *I* could prevent it, Mr. Reginald should never enter the room."

"Bravo!" said Browning, rubbing his hands together.

"So I set to work, and got the pink room prepared for his reception, ntending to say nothing about it until after the visitors should have arrived. However, he discovered it the day before."

"How?" eagerly inquired the butler.

"He happened to meet Eliza on the stairs; and having asked her, quite in a casual way, whether the rooms were all ready for his expected guests, he noticed that she looked confused. This led to his interrogating her pretty sharply; and at last he ordered her to go and bring him the key. She came to me in a great fright, and I bade her remain downstairs while I went up to the master."

"I should think you'd find him in a terrible rage," observed Browning, compressing his lips.

"Well, you know he is always cool and calm," returned Willson.

"*Tant pis!*" exclaimed Juliet, Mrs. Seymour's maid, who had not yet spoken; "I like him not, he is *too* cool; besides, his manner is *très fier* and——"

"I do wish you would learn to speak English like a Christian, Juliet," remarked Ursula, with whom she was no favourite. "I defy any one to understand the jargon of French nonsense you are always talking."

"Jargon!" angrily retorted the lady's-maid. "I tell you, Madame Ursula, in my country——"

"There, it's not worth falling out about," said the butler's decisive voice.

"I think Mademoiselle Juliet is right, though, in calling Mr. Seymour too cool," argued Browning. "I know that for my part I'd rather be rated soundly than undergo the cutting remarks, so calmly and quietly spoken, with which *some people* are accustomed to treat one."

"Our dispositions are all so different," rejoined Willson, gravely, "it is quite impossible for one man to dictate to another in this respect; we must just look to our own tempers, my friend, and try to rectify what is wrong in them, before we attempt to improve our neighbours."

"Then you did not find Mr. Seymour very angry?" said Browning, ignoring the moral her words were calculated to convey.

"He certainly looked stern and displeased; but when I approached him with the key in my hand, and inquired whether he wished to enter the room, he merely bent his head in token of assent.

"While I was unlocking the door, I heard him mutter, 'What a ridiculous notion, locking up the room in this fashion, as if it were some old haunted chamber! Everything will, I suppose, after such neglect, prove dilapidated, if not quite destroyed, and totally unfit for present occupation.'

"As he said this, I had half a mind to try and leave him under the impression he had formed, but then I thought it would be doing evil that good might come, so I boldly threw open the door, and followed him into the room.

"For an instant he stood just within the doorway, gazing around

him like one who, having opened a box which he conceives to be empty, finds it full.

"Then, without uttering a word, he stepped into the middle of the floor, and, raising his eyes, encountered the large portrait of Mr. Herbert that hangs over the mantelpiece.

"I believe it was the first time he had seen his likeness since he left the house; for if you remember," addressing the old butler, "all the other portraits of him were put away the very day he went."

"Yes, yes," was the sorrowful answer; "I remember."

"Well, what came next?" questioned Ursula, in a tone of breathless eagerness.

"Seeing that he appeared deeply moved—as well he might be," continued Willson, struggling with her own feelings, "I quietly slipped into the dressing-room, for fear he should think I was watching him."

"After gazing at the picture for full five minutes, he moved a little away from it, and gave a long, deep sigh. I ventured a glance at him, and when I saw the expression of misery which was depicted upon his countenance, I really pitied him."

"That's more than *I* do!" remarked Browning, in an undertone.

"He does not deserve your *pitié*," said Juliet, shrugging up her shoulders; "it's for madame *je suis fâché*."

"Ah, if we only had what we *deserve*," replied Willson, meaningly, "our own case would be, perhaps, as deplorable as his."

"There seems no end of her wise reflections, to-day," said Browning, in an aside to the cook.

Aloud he answered, "Well, Mrs. Willson—pray go on."

"I waited until Mr. Seymour had regained his usual manner, and then I walked into the bedroom again. On getting sight of me, he observed, quite kindly,—

"'I see I was mistaken in concluding that the room would have a neglected appearance.'

"'Yes, sir,' I answered; 'it has been my endeavour, ever since Mr. Herbert's departure, to keep everything in precisely the same state as he left it.'

"Here I stopped, for I was quite frightened at the strange look that passed over his white face.

"'Don't you know,' he said, clenching his hands, and speaking in a hoarse whisper, 'that I have positively forbidden you to pronounce that name in my hearing?'

"Of course, I replied in the affirmative.

"'Why, then,' he continued, in the same suppressed tone, 'do you run the risk of incurring my severe displeasure by thus disobeying my commands?'

"'Ah, sir, forgive me,' said I, summoning up all my courage; 'I am an old woman, and have not much longer to live in this world, but before I die, I will tell you the truth, be the consequences what they may.'

"I paused a minute for strength to proceed, as the excitement was almost more than I could well bear; but he made no attempt to interrupt me, and I went on,—

"'You ask me, sir, why I disobey your commands?'

"'Yes; why should you?' he demanded, sternly.

"'But you forget, sir, that you have disobeyed the commands of

One far higher in authority than any earthly power; supposing, therefore, He should see fit to call you to account for it, how will you be able to reconcile——'

"'What in the world are you talking about, my good Willson?' he inquired, soothingly; for he evidently fancied I was in my dotage.

"'Well, sir, what I mean is this—you consider yourself fully justified in being angry with me for simply mentioning the name of your absent son; how, then, can *you* expect to go unpunished, who have so cruelly broken the precept laid down in the Holy Scriptures concerning this very matter?'

"You should have seen the look of amazed incredulity with which he regarded me.

"'Which particular precept is visible at the present moment to your mind's eye?' he inquired, with a sort of sneer.

"And then I answered, in fear and trembling,—

"'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.'"

"Capital!" exclaimed Browning, in an ecstacy of delight.

"*He* did not think it capital," returned Willson, thoughtfully.

"What did he say?" questioned the butler.

"Very little, but he gave me a look which made me shake. Presently, however, his countenance softened somewhat, and he spoke in a gentler tone,—

"'As you said just now, Willson, you are an old woman, otherwise I should deem it my duty to reprove you for using such strangely exaggerated language. As it is, I am inclined to overlook your apparent presumption, believing that, however much you may be mistaken, your meaning is good.'

"'At all events, you will allow me to put Mr. Grafton in the pink chamber, instead of bringing him here?' I pleaded.

"'Nonsense!' he hastily exclaimed; 'I am particularly anxious for him to have this room.'

"'It would be little short of desecration,' I answered, boldly.

"'Pooh, pooh!' he exclaimed, smiling contemptuously, though I could see his lip quivering. And then he took another survey of the apartment.

"'What is that?' he suddenly asked, pointing to the toilet-table.

"I at once saw that it was the magnificent dressing-case (all fitted up with gold, and furnished in the most expensive way) that he had himself given to Mr. Herbert, which had arrested his attention. 'Is it possible,' he cried, going forward and opening it, as I put the small gold key into his hand, 'that he left this behind him?'

"'Yes, sir,' I replied; 'and you will find the greater part of his jewellery here also.'

"After lifting the covers, and taking up several valuable studs, chains, rings, etc., as if to assure himself that they were genuine, he reclosed the lid, and handed me the key without a word.

"Then, for the first time, he appeared to notice the various other costly articles scattered over the room, all which belonged, properly speaking, to Mr. Herbert; and perceiving that the sight of them had the effect of awakening his better feelings, I thought it well to bring forward the young master's watch."

"His watch!" ejaculated Ursula; "surely, he was not foolish enough to leave it?"

"He had two," explained Browning, rather impatiently.

"Yes; it happened that on one of his birthdays, the master and mistress bought him one, without mentioning their intention to each other. Mrs. Seymour's was a plain gold watch, with his name cleverly traced in a scroll on the back, while his father's present consisted of a splendid repeater, surrounded by forty diamonds. This was, of course, worth five or six times as much as his mother's, and yet Mr. Herbert chose the latter."

"Did Mr. Seymour make any remark when you called his attention to it?" asked the old butler, rubbing his chin with the forefinger of his right hand.

"No; he gazed at it for nearly ten minutes in perfect silence, turned it over and over in his hand, carefully examined its crimson velvet case in search of Mr. Herbert's initials, which are printed in gold letters inside the lid, together with the date on which it was presented to him, and then finally laid it down upon the table."

"And then?" said Browning, eagerly, as she paused.

"And then," repeated Willson, with the same significant smile that had visited her face at the commencement of the conversation, "then he threw another long, wistful glance around him, set his lips firmly together, and walked slowly and deliberately out of the room."

"Making no further allusion to Mr. Grafton?"

Willson nodded.

"Upon the strength of which," remarked the butler, "you adhered to your former plans."

"Just so," was Willson's prompt response; "having received no positive orders to the contrary, I had Mr. Grafton's luggage conveyed to the pink chamber immediately on its arrival."

"I wonder whether the master knows——" began Eilza, reflectively.

"To be sure he does," said Browning, cutting her short; "what is there he does *not* know?"

"Do you suppose, then, that he approved——"

"*Permits* would be a more suitable word," interposed the staid butler, in a voice of calm decision. "He saw no doubt that Mrs. Willson was in earnest, and though his pride prevented him from yielding his sanction to the proposed arrangement, his fatherly feelings, on the other hand (recently awakened by the sight of so many mementoes of his ill-used son), would not allow him to go the length of actually prohibiting her from carrying out her plan. At present you see the responsibility rests entirely with Mrs. Willson."

"I am quite willing to bear it," she answered, cheerfully; "it would almost break my heart, I believe, to see the dear young master's room taken possession of by Mr. Grafton."

"Ah! there is the carriage," cried Browning, starting up; "I must go and see whether my master requires me."

Thus saying, he hastily made his exit; and soon afterwards the butler followed his example, albeit in a slower and more dignified manner; and Juliet also repaired to Mrs. Seymour's dressing-room, to offer her services in arranging that lady's hair for dinner.

CHAPTER LXII.

MRS. SEYMOUR REFUSES TO RECEIVE REGINALD'S FRIENDS.

"I seek not to wax great by others, waning,
Or gather wealth I care not with what envy."

"I pity all that evil are
I pity and I mourn;
But the Supreme hath fashioned all,
And, oh! *I dare not scorn.*" ROBERT NICOLL.

"You and me's leev'd lang enough
To ken the ills and dangers
That folk hae aft been landed in,
Through tamperin' wi' strangers."

For a week or two after Mr. Grafton's arrival at the Park he continued assiduous in his endeavours to gain the favour of his uncle and aunt. But he could not change his nature, or refrain, with all his studied caution and circumspection, from giving them an occasional glimpse of his real disposition.

With Mr. Seymour this mattered little, as he was prepared to make every excuse for any trifling delinquency, and put the most lenient construction upon all he did. As regards the lady, however, it was quite otherwise. She, not unnaturally, viewed him in the light of a disagreeable interloper, who wished to make a gain of her beloved son's misfortunes, and enrich himself at *his* expense. Consequently her estimate of his character was by no means a flattering one.

It seemed as if Reginald had some suspicion of the kind of feelings Mrs. Seymour entertained towards him, by the earnestness and pertinacity with which he endeavoured to overcome her prejudices, and induce her to treat him less coldly and ungraciously. His uncle took note of his indefatigable zeal in this respect with exceeding pleasure, and sincerely hoped he might succeed. It would be far more satisfactory for all parties, he thought, if she could be brought to regard him with complacency.

For a time Mr. Vernon's politeness kept pace with that of his friend; but, not having the same object to gain in appearing otherwise than what he really was, he gradually became less and less guarded in his behaviour, until the cool contempt with which he had at first inspired Mrs. Seymour, was exchanged for umitigated aversion.

Her husband, perceiving that the young man's society was peculiarly distasteful to her, privately suggested to his nephew the expediency of giving his friend a gentle intimation of the fact, and civilly proposing that his visit should come to an immediate end.

This duty Reginald undertook, and accomplished in as graceful a manner as could, under the circumstances, be expected; and Mrs. Seymour soon had the gratification of seeing one of her obnoxious visitors leave the Park.

After his departure, Reginald firmly resolved on comporting himself with double circumspection, and he certainly contrived to get through a fortnight very creditably.

Then—alas, for his good intentions! in an evil hour he made the acquaintance of Edmund Hastings; and, finding that his society fully compensated for the loss of his confidential companion, Mr. Vernon, he at once attached himself to him, and was, without much difficulty, raised to the honour of being admitted as a member of that unprincipled young man's coterie.

Mrs. Seymour's formal parties (which she now continued more from habit than because she derived any particular pleasure from them) he voted an intolerable bore; but Edmund Hastings' noisy and convivial entertainments were irresistibly pleasing to his badly organised mind.

Such constant and close intimacy with these ungodly and dissipated young men could not long remain unattended by some kind of result. A change, imperceptible at first, but becoming more and more decided as the time passed on, marked Reginald's general conduct; and though his self-interest would not allow him to relax in his efforts to win Mrs. Seymour's good opinion, the hours which he devoted to her were more grudgingly given then heretofore—especially when he discovered, to his infinite chagrin, that, with all his endeavours, he had utterly failed in advancing one step in her esteem.

She was always courteous and ladylike, but *never* warm or even friendly in her manner towards Reginald; and while anxious to afford him no shadow of excuse for charging her with treating a guest either rudely or uncivilly, she was equally determined to avoid the very remotest appearance of conniving at any transaction intended to invest *him* with those rights and privileges of which her own son had been so ruthlessly deprived.

It happened one day that Reginald Grafton, taking advantage of the singular kindness and indulgence Mr. Seymour had shown him ever since his arrival at the Park, invited a few of his particular friends to dine with them that same evening.

He suffered no uneasiness as to the issue of this experiment until he met his uncle and aunt at luncheon, and remembered that he ought to tell them what he had done. Then he experienced a degree of embarrassment which surprised himself.

However, as the announcement must be made, he thought he might as well get over it as quickly possible; and calling his usual *sang froid* to his aid, he observed in a tone of well-feigned careless indifference,—

"By the bye, I was almost forgetting to mention that I have asked a few friends to dine here this evening. I hope you don't mind it, my dear aunt?"

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Seymour, smiling blandly.

N.B. His wife said nothing.

"I knew you would have no objection," returned Reginald, beginning to feel a sensation of profound relief; "you and my aunt are so well known for your kindness and hospitality, that——"

"Perhaps you will be good enough to inform us *who* you have invited," remarked Mrs. Seymour, mercilessly interrupting him in the middle of this complimentary flourish; "'a few friends' is rather too vague an expression for *me* to understand, all unacquainted as I

am with the style of individuals who are honoured with your friendship!"

"Oh, of course," replied Reginald, becoming again somewhat perturbed in mind.

And he proceeded, though with considerable hesitation, to mention the names of those to whom he had given invitations.

Mrs. Seymour stopped him at Mr. Edmund Hastings.

"The others will be welcome," she said, in a firm, peremptory voice, which Herbert, had he been present, would scarcely have recognised as belonging to his gentle mother. "But you had better write at once to Mr. Hastings and Captain Lyndock, and put them off. I would not for the universe dine at the same table with either of them!"

Reginald stared at her in open-eyed astonishment, too much bewildered to speak.

"Perhaps, my dear," suggested Mr. Seymour, in a soft, insinuating voice, such as never failed, in by-gone days, to have the desired effect; "as the invitations are given, we might for this once make an exception. Now that Reginald knows your wishes on the subject, he will never think of asking them again."

"Decidedly not," said the young man, energetically; "I had no idea——"

"If *they* dine here, I shall not!" exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, in a short, decided tone.

Mr. Seymour found himself on the horns of a dilemma. He was fully alive to the importance of seeking by every possible means to conciliate his wife, more especially at the present juncture; and yet, on the other hand, he felt reluctant to expose Reginald to the mortification of being obliged to withdraw the invitations he had that very morning freely given.

"To prevent these *désagrémens* for the future," continued the lady, rising from her seat and ringing the bell, preparatory to leaving the room, "it may be well for you to recollect, that, being yourself a guest in this house, it would be more consonant with good taste were you to go through the form of consulting my wishes and convenience *previous* to undertaking the responsibility of entertaining guests at dinner."

The colour flew into Reginald's cheek at this well-merited reproof; but as he made no attempt to exculpate himself, Mr. Seymour said excusingly,—

"I assure you, my dear, it was mere thoughtlessness—nothing more!"

"Very likely," replied the lady, with a little curl of her upper lip.

"The fact of his poor grandfather having always allowed him to invite any one he pleased to the house," pursued her husband, in an apologetic tone, "should——"

"Yes, I have heard of that!" said Mrs. Seymour, with a short, dry laugh. "However, this is nothing to the purpose," she added slowly and with evident determination: "if we had been going to dine alone to-day, I would, notwithstanding my utter detestation of these young men, raise no objection to their company, as I could quite easily absent myself from the table; but I expect the Crossleys, and perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Limerick, therefore it is altogether out of the question.

Burns," she continued, turning to the old butler, who just then entered the room, "Mr. Grafton has invited four gentlemen to dinner, in addition to the guests concerning whom I have already given orders. These four gentlemen you will admit, but I wish you to give the other servants to understand that, in the event of Mr. Hastings or Captain Lyndoch calling, we are not at home. Do you comprehend me, Burns?"

"Perfectly," returned the old man, bowing and retiring.

"Now, Reginald, I am sorry to appear harsh or abrupt, but it was necessary that this matter should be settled at once, as I have several calls to make before dinner. You will have abundance of time to write a letter of excuse to these two gentlemen (or, if you prefer it, call on them), and you are quite welcome to lay the blame on me."

Thus saying, Mrs. Seymour swept out of the apartment with an air of calm dignity, and a look of firmness and resolve, such as her face was rarely known to wear.

An interval of silence succeeded her departure, broken by Reginald blurting out,—

"'Pon my word, I'm terribly sorry! I couldn't have believed, though, she'd take it up like that."

"You should have sounded her before committing yourself, my boy," said Mr. Seymour, smiling at his dismayed countenance.

"And so I would," returned the young man, somewhat regretfully, "if I had had the faintest suspicion that she was so desperately prejudiced."

"But, after all," observed Mr. Seymour, with a good-humoured attempt at consolation, "it's only two out of the six that your aunt objects to."

"True," replied Reginald; but it was spoken very hesitatingly.

"And then you must remember that nothing can be easier than for you to write to Hastings and Lyndoch, and invent a likely excuse for not being able to receive them this evening."

"Yes," said the young man, endeavouring to smile. "But"—this he added almost inaudibly—"I would rather offend all the others than him."

"What?" exclaimed his uncle, struck by something peculiar in his manner. "Do you mean Hastings?"

"Well—yes," returned Reginald, colouring, and growing more and more confused under Mr. Seymour's searching gaze.

"Why should you be so desirous to keep well with *him?*" demanded the latter, laying his hand meaningly upon the young man's arm; "you surely are not in his power!"

"In his power!" repeated Reginald, in a husky whisper; "oh, no, of course not."

And he tried to force a laugh.

But it would not do. His uncle's words had evidently touched some sore spot in his memory.

"Now, Reginald, tell me the plain truth," said Mr. Seymour, kindly, yet firmly: "what have you to fear from this man?"

After a little demur, Reginald was persuaded into an avowal of his true position.

Since his grandfather's death he had, according to his own confession, been living beyond his means. When he became aware of

this astounding fact, he tried several methods, not of lessening his expenditure, but of getting his annual income increased.

Failing in this (for General Clare had prudently made arrangements which precluded his reckless heir from possessing any positive power over the bulk of his property) it occurred to his speculative mind that if he could contrive to step into the vacant niche in Mr. Seymour's favour and affection, it might conduce very considerably to his pecuniary advantage.

So far, his hopes had to a certain extent been realized; for though the old debts were still unpaid, he had, previous to his intimacy with Mr. Hastings, refrained from contracting fresh ones, and he knew that his uncle would, if occasion required, act in the most liberal manner towards him.

But he was not prepared for the various temptations which assailed him on his first introduction to his new friends; and even if he had been aware of their approach, he wanted the necessary firmness and strength of mind to resist them.

Among their other failings, Edmund and his associates were all inveterate card-players, and Reginald, who greatly prided himself upon his own skill, greedily joined with them in this questionable amusement.

He was beaten again and again,—Edmund Hastings' long familiarity with continental gambling houses having initiated him into all their mysteries, and made him more than a match for any except those who had enjoyed similar advantages; and when, in a fit of pique and feverish excitement, he strove to retrieve his losses, he only increased and augmented them.

"It is to Mr. Hastings you owe the greater part of these debts of honour, I presume?" said Mr. Seymour, after patiently listening to this recital—told, you may be sure, in very different language, and softened and embellished, so as to make Reginald Grafton appear in the light of a much-injured individual!

The young man answered in the affirmative.

"And he is probably beginning to intimate that he has already waited long enough for payment," pursued his uncle, with a smile of conscious power.

"You are right, sir," exclaimed Reginald, hotly; "indeed, he was scarcely civil to me when I asked him to wait for a short time longer."

"Yet, *knowing this*, you invited him here!" remarked Mr. Seymour, in surprise.

"Yes," returned Reginald rather confusedly; "I knew it would annoy him exceedingly if I, in giving an invitation to the others, excluded him."

He did not further explain that, having boasted to Mr. Hastings of his expectations as Mr. Seymour's probable heir, and alleged this as a strong inducement for requesting him to consent to the proposed delay, his unprincipled friend had tauntingly replied that before he could give credence to Reginald's assertion he must have ocular demonstration of the close and affectionate terms on which he professed to be with his uncle, and likewise be enabled to form his own conclusions as to the chance he stood of finally coming in for the property.

Stung to the quick by this insult, and yet obliged to conceal his feelings, lest Mr. Hastings should insist on the immediate liquidation of his debts, Reginald conceived the idea of inviting him and his friends to the Park, hoping thereby to impress them with a sense of his own importance of being thus permitted to act independently of his uncle and aunt, and also afford Edmund Hastings the opportunity he desired of satisfying himself regarding Mr. Seymour's sentiments and intentions.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE LETTER BAG.

"They come!—those shadowy phantoms,
They stand before me now,
And lay their icy fingers
Upon my throbbing brow:
They come!—unasked, unwelcomed,
Wherever I may be!
I scorn them, yet I fear them,
And cannot from them flee.

They point to memory's pages,
All blotted and defiled;
They mock my anguished spirit,
With visions strange and wild;
My withered dreams of brightness,
Now changed for dark despair,
My buried joys and gladness,
Alas! I see them there!"

ANON.

"IT'S a confounded pity," continued Reginald, with a stealthy glance at his uncle, "that I should have been fool enough to let Hastings get the better of me in this fashion. I quite expected to be a match for him; but———"

An expressive shrug completed the sentence.

"Well, it can't be helped now," replied Mr. Seymour, in a tone well calculated to raise the young man's expectations. "If I had known there was the least danger of your becoming intimate with him, I would have warned you against having anything to say to him, as his character is far from irreproachable; but you will, I dare say, learn a lesson from this little *contretemps*, and be more circumspect for the future in your choice of friends."

"Indeed I shall!" was the answer, accompanied by a hypocritical sigh.

"Very good," returned Mr. Seymour, approvingly. "Now, if you promise me that you will immediately drop Mr. Hastings' acquaintance, I will enable you to free yourself from this debt!"

"Oh, thank you a thousand times, my dear uncle!" cried Reginald, with an extravagant affectation of gratitude. "There's no fear of my wanting his acquaintance after this, I assure you; but I scarcely know how to express my——"

"What is the amount?" inquired Mr. Seymour, taking out a small pocket-book, and preparing to note down the figures.

Reginald reluctantly named the sum total.

But when he saw that, large though it was, Mr. Seymour entered it in his book without a word of comment, he began to recover his wonted assurance, and even to wish (I blush to own it, yet it is a fact)

that he had not thought of mentioning a still larger sum, in order that he might appropriate the surplus to his own use.

"While you are writing your two notes of excuse I will get a cheque ready for you to enclose in Mr. Hastings'," remarked Mr. Seymour, with a little smile, as he rose and walked out of the room.

In a few minutes he returned, holding the cheque in his hand.

"I think it might be better for me to call and give it to him myself, instead of putting it in a letter," suggested the young man, gazing wistfully at the precious piece of paper.

"Would it not be unwise of you thus to rush into temptation?" asked his uncle, somewhat gravely.

"Oh, there is no fear of my being taken in a second time," replied Reginald, rubbing his hands together in the fulness of his delight. "I'll just settle with him, and get his receipt——"

"Ah, there's some sense in that!" exclaimed the other, in an approbatory tone; "but don't again suffer yourself to be drawn into any such entanglements, my boy."

"You may trust me for that, uncle," he answered, laughing and nodding his head. "There's no teacher like experience."

"Yes, experience *does* teach," mused Mr. Seymour, when he found himself alone; "but sometimes her lessons are neither pleasant nor profitable."

And this was only the commencement of a long and serious train of reflection.

Visions of the past came rushing with resistless force into the secret chambers of his memory; and whichever way he turned, whatever subject he considered, *Herbert's face* (as he had so lately seen it, gazing down upon him from the walls of the blue room) and Herbert's character, pure, unselfish, and without reproach, lay vividly before him, as if in opposition to that of Reginald—the one so noble, and true, and disinterested in all he did; the other grovelling, and sordid, and contemptible, whose sole aim, object, and ambition in life consisted in pleasing, gratifying, and benefiting HIMSELF, irrespective of the welfare or prosperity of any one else.

The contrast was almost startling, and for the space of half a minute the proud man's head was bowed, and a low, quivering sound issued from his bloodless lips.

Ah! if Herbert could only have been a silent witness of that sight, his very heart would have bounded and throbbed with wild and tumultuous joy, and the sweet star of Hope would have appeared amid the darkness of despair which often clouded his pathway, and saddened his otherwise peaceful life.

And yet it was better not. The reaction would have been too cruel; the transition from despair to hope, and thence to despair again, only an additional aggravation of his suffering, leading to that peculiar heart-faintness which a weary, toil-worn traveller may be supposed to feel when, amidst the desert's solitude, a cup of cold water—cold, clear and sparkling—is raised to his parched lips, and just as he is about to drink it, lo! the cup is suddenly dashed from his hand, and the delicious draught lost to him for ever.

Thus might it have been with Herbert, had he marked the haughty resolution which swept away every vestige of these momentary tokens of emotion from Mr. Seymour's face, and made him appear once more in his old character—calm, dignified, and complacent.

"I must not expect perfection," he murmured, his thoughts evidently reverting to Reginald Grafton; "and though I cannot say that I am altogether satisfied with his conduct in this business, still, having had it in my power to be useful to him, will make him all the more anxious to give me satisfaction for the time to come; and the very fact of his finding it difficult to live with his own means will dispose him to receive with gratitude any addition I may think proper to bestow, besides enabling him rightly to value and appreciate the opportunity he has of improving his permanent position."

Having arrived at this satisfactory conclusion, Mr. Seymour rose from his chair, and began to walk up and down the apartment.

At length he stopped in front of the grate, empty now, for the weather was too warm to admit of a fire; and with his elbows resting on the mantelpiece, he continued for some time longer apparently absorbed in thought.

The first thing that aroused him was the opening of the library door by Browning, who laid down a letter-bag upon the table, and silently withdrew.

I may mention, *en passant*, that the introduction of this letter-bag into Mr. Seymour's household did not take place until after Herbert's departure.

Glad, perhaps, of something to divert his attention, Mr. Seymour took a key from his pocket, and, unlocking the bag, threw out its contents.

A miscellaneous heap of letters and papers, of almost every shape and size, met his eye. Lawyers' bulky documents and ladies' fairy-like notes of invitation amicably reposing side by side, and the exquisitely traced caligraphy of his high-born relatives lying in close proximity to the unsightly scrawl of some quondam kitchen-maid; for Mr. Seymour's *surveillance* in the matter of correspondence extended even to the servants' establishment.

His first care, however, was to select all those letters which bore his wife's address, and having attentively examined the handwriting, size and postmark of each, he put them aside, and proceeded to look at his own.

These were numerous; but several of them he swept into his desk without opening; the rest he just glanced over, and then, tearing them up, threw the pieces into a paper-basket which lay under the table.

A smile of unequivocal contempt curled his lips as he ran his eye over the superscription of a few of the missives intended for the servants' hall.

He had completed his usual investigation, and was on the point of ringing for Browning to carry them to their owners, when, on moving the bag aside—empty as he supposed—he observed that there was a slit in the lining, into which three of the letters had slipped.

With a slight feeling of curiosity, he removed them from their hiding-place.

Two were addressed to his wife, the other to himself.

One of the two was a foreign letter, and bore the St. Petersburg postmark. A very cursory examination served to convince Mr. Seymour that the handwriting belonged to Charles Hastings.

"Ha, ha!" he murmured, in accents of surprise and gratulation; "It's well I happened to see this. I wonder"—spoken slowly and doubtingly—"whether it will be advisable to show it to her. No, no," he added in a firm, decided tone, "I had better not risk it; it will be sure to contain some *mal-apropos* allusion to the past, and will only have the effect of agitating and exciting her to no purpose."

Accordingly, he deliberately tore it through the middle, and consigned it unread (Mr. Seymour was much too upright and honourable in his dealings to think of *perusing* it!) to the afore-mentioned basket.

"Now for the others!" he exclaimed, turning them over in his hand: "they are probably some——"

He paused, and started back in his chair, pale and stern, on perceiving that, though one bore his own and the other his wife's address, both were directed in the same hand, and came from the same place. That hand, it is almost needless to say, was Herbert's.

With a muttered imprecation, not worthy of being recorded in these pages, he recovered himself after a few minutes, and, resuming his former rigidly erect position, he cast another earnest, searching glance at the writing, his brow meanwhile becoming painfully bent and contracted.

As he continued to gaze upon these once familiar characters, a strong desire took possession of him to break the seal, and discover how his discarded son was now situated; but he checked his fingers when they were about to afford him practical assistance in the way of gratifying his curiosity, and with his characteristic strength of will repelled the idea as weak and undignified, and wholly incompatible with that wonderful firmness and resolution for which he was so justly distinguished.

"No, no," he said, in a thick, husky voice; "I have passed my word, and come what may I will not break it."

Taking a wax taper from the mantelpiece, he lighted it, and held the two letters over the flame until they had taken fire. Then he threw them inside the fender, and watched them as they gradually smouldered into ashes, muttering between his closed teeth,—

"It is not the first I have received from the same quarter; neither will it be the last, I suspect."

For the remainder of that day Mr. Seymour's manner was unusually grave and preoccupied. He courteously performed his duties as host, and exerted himself to entertain his guests; but it evidently cost him a very great effort to do so.

Reginald noticed this change in his uncle's demeanour with considerable uneasiness, fearing that it arose from dissatisfaction with himself, and was intended to show that he already repented of his generosity towards him; while Mrs. Seymour ascribed it entirely to the decisive measures she had adopted to assert her own authority respecting the non-admission of Edmund Hastings and Captain Lyndoch to her dinner-table.

Perhaps Browning was better informed than either of them as to the cause of his master's moody brow.

On being summoned to the library for the purpose of removing the letters, he observed the recently extinguished taper (which Mr. Seymour had forgotten to return to its old place on the mantelpiece)

standing upon the table, in front of that gentleman's chair; and quick as thought his eye wandered to the handful of blackened paper still floating about inside the fender.

This was enough to arouse his suspicions; and he was fully convinced of their correctness when he paid a visit to the waste-paper basket half an hour later, and discovered the remains of Charles Hastings' letter, plainly addressed, as he could see, to his mistress!

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM.

"No, I will be the pattern of all patience,
I will say nothing."

"This tyranny 's too much to endure."

"On my soul,
'Tis mournful, wondrous mournful."

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude." SHAKESPEARE.

BEING of an excitable and by no means reticent disposition, it never occurred to Browning to try and conceal his sentiments from the notice of others.

When, therefore, he discovered these additional proofs of Mr. Seymour's arbitrary and tyrannical mode of treating his wife, he rushed forthwith into the housekeeper's room, where that functionary was seated with two or three of the upper servants, enjoying a short season of quiet conversation after their midday meal; and, in answer to the inquiries which were called forth by his excited countenance, he unhesitatingly told them of his well-grounded suspicions.

The housekeeper looked uneasily at Juliet; but she studiously avoided committing herself by expressing an opinion one way or the other.

"Isn't it shameful?" cried Browning, turning appealingly towards her when he had finished his hurried account.

Then, suddenly struck by her silence, he continued in huge indignation,—

"*You* surely don't approve of such conduct, Mrs. Morby?"

"Approve!" she said, with a little cough; "I must really beg to be excused from discussing the subject at all; it is quite out of my province, you know."

"Time-server!" muttered Browning; but fortunately it was in too low a tone for Mrs. Morby, who was slightly deaf, to hear.

"I approve not of such *conduite*," interposed Juliet, giving him a sympathetic touch on the arm; "I think with you, Monsieur Browning, that it is simple *tyrannie*."

"So it is; nothing else," responded Browning, with a glance of approbation at her kindling face. "I declare he goes beyond all bounds; it's perfectly disgraceful!"

"What is disgraceful?" asked the old butler, entering the room with a decanter in each hand.

"The master's conduct, of course," impatiently retorted Browning.

"Why,—is there anything new?" questioned Burns; and he looked anxiously over at Willson, whose whole attention seemed to be given to the pages of the book she was reading.

"New!" repeated Browning, shrugging his broad shoulders; "I

dare say not; he would scarcely take it so coolly, I suspect, if he had not been in the habit of burning her letters."

"Whatever are you talking about?" exclaimed the butler, laying down his decanter, and surveying the fiery young man in calm surprise.

Browning explained.

"Ah! it's very sad," returned the old man, musingly, "*very*. But what can be done?"

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Morby, leaning comfortably back in her chair, and speaking with affected concern.

"One thing we can and ought to do," said Browning, sinking his voice to a confidential and impressive whisper; "and that is, give Mrs. Seymour a hint——"

"What!" exclaimed the housekeeper, raising her hands in unfeigned dismay.

"Yes," continued Browning, paying no heed to her implied remonstrance; "why should we allow her to go on, week after week, and month after month, waiting and hoping to hear from him, and yet never hearing? It will be very easy for you, Juliet, to find a suitable opportunity of introducing the subject."

"Silence!" exclaimed Willson, suddenly closing her book, and regarding the impulsive valet with a look of severity. "Do you suppose that *I* would not have told your mistress all this long ago, if I thought the information would have the least effect in easing her sore heart? *I*," she repeated, her dim eyes expanding under some long-forgotten emotion, "who have known her ever since she was an infant, and love her as if she were my own child."

"But perhaps you were not aware until now," soothingly suggested Browning, "of the full extent of Mr. Seymour's——"

"I *was* aware!" she answered, pressing her withered lips painfully together; "I have suspected it all along; but what then? Could I go and deliberately set a wife against her own husband?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Morby, complacently folding her hands: "one never gets anything by interfering in these peculiar cases."

"It isn't that," returned Willson, hastily; while Browning contented himself with expressing his contempt for Mrs. Morby's motives by a few significant words, which were inaudible to all save Juliet and the old butler; "the question is, would our interference be attended with any beneficial result?"

"Yes, that's it!" ejaculated Burns, reflectively, nodding his head.

"Well, in this instance," pursued Willson, "I plainly saw that, instead of improving the poor lady's condition, I should be adding to her suffering, were I to widen the breach which already exists between herself and her husband. It's bad enough already," she went on, sadly and regretfully; "but I tell you, Browning: if your advice was carried out, she would never know a day's peace again."

"How do you make that out?" asked Browning, awed by the solemnity of her manner.

"Don't you know that when once Mr. Seymour is offended it's for ever?" she inquired.

Browning acquiesced.

"Well, at present the fact of his having wronged her in this one particular makes him all the more tender of her in other respects. He is also very careful not to thwart her, and as he seems on every

occasion to consult *her* comfort and convenience rather than his own, she has no grounds (whatever her private suspicions may be) for making any positive charge against him. But should she ever have her suspicions changed for certainty, a terrible crisis would follow."

"Do you really think so?" queried Browning, beginning to fee somewhat shaken in mind.

"I am persuaded of it; and then we must recollect that *she* would be the sufferer. All her remonstrances and struggles would be of no avail, and from henceforth all semblance of affection would cease to be kept up between them. I leave you to guess," added the sensible old woman, "the kind of life she would lead after that."

"I am afraid it's all too true, my lad," said the butler, gravely, responding to the anxious, inquiring look which Browning directed towards him; "to say the least of it, 'twould be a great risk."

"Mr. Burns is right," observed Mrs. Morby, in a voice of patronising superiority; "it *would* be a risk—greater than you imagine," she added meaningly.

"How so?" inquired Browning.

"Why, it might probably result in you losing your place," she replied, with a dry little laugh.

To this Browning vouchsafed no reply, beyond a look of ineffable scorn.

"Is there yet any perceptible change in her manner towards Mr. Grafton?" inquired the housekeeper, leaning forward, and addressing the old butler in a confidential tone.

"No! nor ever will be," he rejoined, with an expressive movement of his head.

"You think, then, there is no chance of her becoming reconciled to him?"

"Not until she forgets her own son," was the emphatic answer.

"I suppose she has no idea of *his* whereabouts?" observed Mrs. Morby again.

"*He* has," said Burns, with a short sniff.

"He—Mr. Seymour?"

"No; Mr. Reginald."

"What makes you suppose that?" demanded Browning, eagerly.

Before replying to this question, Burns opened the door, and looked cautiously around to see that there were no superfluous listeners. Then he said, in a voice of concentrated gravity,—

"The last night Mr. Vernon was here, he and Mr. Reginald sat up amusing themselves in the smoking-room long after Mr. Seymour had retired to rest.

"They must have drank pretty freely, for, just as I was locking up my pantry for the night, I heard them call for more wine; and, on going into the room, thinking there was some mistake, I found that they had emptied all the decanters."

"They both seemed in a remarkably merry and talkative humour; and while I was supplying them with fresh bottles, hot water, etc., I could not help hearing parts of their conversation.

"I paid no attention, however, to anything they said, until Mr. Vernon remarked with a loud laugh,—

"'How will you get on without me, old fellow?'

"'The best I can,' replied Mr. Grafton, making a curious kind of grimace, 'but it will be awfully dull.'

"'At all events, you have your worshipful uncle to fall upon,' continued Mr. Vernon, staggering from his chair, and trying to imitate Mr. Seymour's manner and tone; 'and that, my boy, is a privilege which you cannot prize too highly!'

"'Come, Vernon, no nonsense!' cried his friend, laughing heartily at the pompous way in which he drawled out these words; 'you know as well as I do what an insufferable nuisance his society is to me!'

"'Well, don't get *too* fond of him,' was Mr. Vernon's jocular answer, 'or else you may, in a moment of confidence, be led into betraying something or other which it might be more prudent to keep to yourself. Among other little episodes, I should recommend you to maintain a strict silence regarding the visit we so lately paid his saintly son!'"

"What a pair of consummate hypocrites they must be!" quoth Browning, parenthetically.

"You may be sure," resumed the butler, with a contemplative shake of his head, "that I listened with redoubled attention, when they made this allusion to Mr. Herbert."

"I am astonished," remarked Mrs. Morby, in her calmly indifferent voice, "that they were not afraid to speak thus openly in your presence."

"As I said before, they had been drinking very freely, otherwise they might have been more guarded in their language. Several times I was about to withdraw, fancying I had no excuse for remaining longer, but they always called me back for something, and appeared quite regardless of my being there. It's my belief, that they would scarcely have minded had Mr. Seymour himself been present, owing to the queer maudlin state they were both in."

"And yet they seem to have had all their wits about them."

"Yes, so far as telling the truth went, but——"

"And what answer did Mr. Grafton make, when Mr. Vernon said that?" inquired Browning, without giving him an opportunity of completing his sentence,

"Oh! he laughed; and said he was a fool!"

"He isn't far wrong there!" contemptuously ejaculated the other; "but I very much suspect he has a good deal of the knave in his character."

"I really cannot countenance your using these unpardonably strong expressions," interposed the housekeeper, with quiet severity; "if by any chance Mr. Seymour were to overhear you, he would naturally hold *me* responsible for the mutinous language uttered in my own private sitting-room; and I can assure you I have no wish whatever to be implicated in such a delicate affair."

"I dare say not," muttered Browning, rather amused than otherwise at her evident anxiety to maintain a thoroughly neutral position; "but you have nothing to fear," he continued, rasing his voice; "no one can accuse you of speaking disrespectfully of Mr. Seymour, or Mr. Grafton either, for that matter."

"I am quite aware of it," she answered, complacently, without detecting the hidden sarcasm of his words; "still I always like to——"

"Please every one," suggested Browning, with a meaning glance at the butler.

"Not exactly," she replied, "though I certainly have been singularly fortunate in possessing and retaining the esteem and confidence of all those with whom I have ever come in contact; and this I greatly ascribe to my prudence and good management."

Notwithstanding his habitual gravity, Burns was obliged to turn away his face, in order to conceal a smile at Mrs. Morby's excessive self-conceit.

However, he knew that what she said was—so far as it went—perfectly correct. She *had* succeeded in gaining the confidence of her employers, albeit the measures she took to accomplish this desirable end were not always praiseworthy, neither were her motives such as would bear to be strictly investigated.

"The fact is," continued Mrs. Morby, addressing Browning with an air of one who was fully conscious that the superiority of her position, no less than her personal attainments and experience, well qualified her to offer him advice, "your rashness and impetuosity often cause you to overlook your own interests."

"My own interests!" disdainfully echoed the valet; "how do I overlook them?"

"By taking so little pains to conceal your feelings. If, for instance, any one were to go and repeat to Mr. Seymour what you have now been saying, your doom would instantly be fixed!"

"My doom!" began Browning, with a laugh. But Juliet interrupted him by saying indignantly,—

"None of us would ever think of doing that, Madame Morby."

"Perhaps not," she answered, carelessly; "but I have read somewhere that we should treat even our best friends as if they might one day be converted into foes."

"The Lord preserve us from following such a worldly maxim;" aspirated Willson, once more raising her eyes from her book, and gravely fixing them upon Mrs. Morby's face; "what say you Burns?"

"I would certainly rather err on the other side," replied the butler, contemplatively.

"*Sans doute*," exclaimed Juliet, nodding her head, "it's far better."

"I'd like to hear Mrs. Morby's definition of a good servant," remarked Browning, after a brief pause.

"Would you?" she answered, setting herself into a more comfortable position. "In the first place, then, I take it that the duty of a servant who really wishes to give satisfaction greatly consists in having no opinion of his own, or, if he has one, he should be careful not to betray the fact."

"Just as if we were stocks and stones!" soliloquised Browning.

"Secondly, it is absolutely necessary——"

A slight tap at the door made her abruptly stop, and exclaim, "Come in," while she sat bolt upright in her chair, and looked to see who the intruder might be.

It was only a footman come to say that his mistress desired to speak to Mrs. Morby in her dressing-room.

"Ah, I must go!" she said, taking up a note-book and pencil from the table. "There is to be a grand dinner-party to-morrow night, and I have no doubt it is on that subject Mrs. Seymour wishes to speak. I dare say," she added, bestowing on Browning

a promissory smile, "I shall be able to finish my description this evening."

"I'm sure I hope not!" observed the young man, with a comical expression of dismay, as the door closed upon her; "I've already heard quite enough."

"Fire and water seldom agree, my lad," sagely remarked the butler, deliberately repossessing himself of the decanters and marching off to his own pantry, thus leaving Browning free to discuss the matter as much as he thought proper with Juliet and Mrs. Willson.

CHAPTER LXV.

REGINALD'S TREACHERY IS DISCOVERED.

"For never can true reconcilement grow
Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep,
Which would but lead me to a worse relapse
And heavier fall. So should I purchase dear
Short intermission bought with double smart." MILTON.

"Grant, Lord,
That when sorrows are to be redressed, such may
Be done with mildness, speed, and firmness, not
With violence or hate, whereby one wrong
Translates another—both to Thee abhorrent."
JOANNA BAILLIE.

FOR nearly a year Reginald Grafton had continued to reside with the Seymours; and, from the marked consideration with which his uncle uniformly treated him, it seemed highly probable that he would soon be formally acknowledged as that gentleman's heir!

For obvious reasons, Mr. Seymour had refrained from binding himself down to anything until they should both become better acquainted with each other's character, and have a fair opportunity of judging of their respective expectations and requirements.

Now, however, he resolved on bringing things to a crisis.

It was not enough to destroy the documents which he had originally executed in favour of Herbert, and thrust Reginald forward, and introduce him to the world as his adopted son: other and more active measures must be taken, if he wished to secure the property to the latter; otherwise, in spite of his precautions, our hero would still be considered his lawful heir, in the event of anything happening to himself.

Accordingly, to the young man's infinite delight, he said to him one morning, in a low, significant tone,—

"Unless you have any particular engagement, I should like you to remain at home to-day, as I am expecting a visit from my solicitor, and your presence may probably be required."

"All right, uncle," he replied, scarcely able to disguise his feelings of triumph; "I will keep close to the house, so as to be at hand when you want me."

But for that day at least Reginald Grafton was doomed to be disappointed, as Mr. Malcolm did not make his appearance. A letter which Mr. Seymour received from him the following morning explained that a sudden attack of indisposition had prevented him from keeping his appointment, and another day was fixed instead.

Before it arrived, Mr. Seymour's faith in his nephew was somewhat shaken by the following circumstance:—

He happened to espy an open letter lying in the hall close to his feet, and having unthinkingly picked it up, he as unthinkingly pro-

ceeded to find out to whom it belonged, which was not a difficult task —the very first line showing that the writer must be Reginald Grafton, and the person addressed, his friend Mr. Vernon.

On discovering this, Mr. Seymour began to fold the letter, intending to embrace the first opportunity of returning it to the owner, but one word which his eye inadvertently fell on made him pause and throw a keen, lightning glance over the rest of the page.

Then he deliberately turned to the commencement, and, with a firm pressure of the lips, and dark contracting brow, read the whole letter.

This done, he hastily conveyed it to his pocket, and strode off to his library, where he remained for upwards of an hour.

His face was very pale and determined when at length he left it, and, going up to Reginald, whom he found indolently lounging upon one of the drawing-room sofas, calmly signified his wish to have a few minutes' conversation with him.

"Oh, certainly, uncle," exclaimed the young man, starting forward with alacrity; but he suddenly stopped on observing the stern expression of Mr. Seymour's face, and began to look uneasily around him, as if to discover the cause of his evident displeasure.

"You may perhaps remember," remarked that gentleman, in a tone of concentrated severity, "that when I invited you to this house it was on the express understanding that, unless some other arrangement should in the meanwhile be entered into between us, your visit should terminate at the expiration of a year."

Seeing that a reply was expected, Reginald managed to stammer out an answer in the affirmative.

"I had, as you seem to be aware," pursued Mr. Seymour, steadily fixing his eyes upon the young man's face, "formed an idea of making certain changes in our relative positions, which would cause a very decided improvement in your circumstances; but as I find that my confidence has been entirely misplaced, and that you are, in short, totally unworthy of the distinction I was about to confer on you, I must warn you against expecting anything further from me; and (however I may regret being obliged to appear unkind and inhospitable) candidly inform you that the sooner you make it convenient to leave the Park, the better I shall be pleased!"

Reginald Grafton sat for the space of a few minutes, blankly staring at the opposite wing. He was unable to realize what he heard; the announcement being too sudden, and the painful truth too unexpected and humiliating, for his weak mind to bear all at once.

Before he could summon courage to speak, his uncle continued, with a glance made up of anger and contempt,—

"I dare say you would wish to know *how* I detected your unfitness to fill the position for which I designed you."

The young man sullenly bent his head, but said nothing.

"About an hour ago, I found a letter, unsealed and addressed——"

With a guilty start, and quickly suppressed ejaculation, Reginald nervously felt in his pockets for the confidential epistle he had written to his friend that morning, and discovering no sign of it, he grew fearfully pale, though he made a wonderful effort to maintain a calm and indifferent manner.

"This letter," resumed his uncle, meaningly accentuating every word, "I should never have dreamt of reading, had I not chanced

to see my own name mentioned with less respect than I deemed due from you to myself; and as I felt particularly anxious to ascertain the nature of your sentiments previous to Mr. Malcom's arrival, I made no scruple of profiting by the opportunity thus afforded me of gaining the information I required."

"Then it's all up with me, I suppose," muttered Reginald, glancing half fearfully, half defiantly, at the ireful countenance of his offended relative.

"You may well say so!" was Mr. Seymour's indignant response. "Not only do I find in this unique production" (drawing forth the letter in question, and opening it with a haughty curl of his lip) "*myself* and everything connected with me, and my performances, turned into ridicule—not only do you coarsely and brutally allude to a certain painful circumstance which unfortunately transpired in my family, and exultingly expatiate upon the pecuniary advantages you hope to derive therefrom—not only is the advice I have given you scornfully styled 'bombastic nonsense,' the large sums of money I from time to time put into your hands mentioned as a 'niggardly allowance,' and the debts from which I freed you on four different occasions referred to as 'not worth speaking of,' *but* you positively make a boast of having acted in direct opposition to my wishes, and, while claiming immense credit with your unprincipled friend for so cunningly persuading me of your willingness to follow my suggestions and carry out my plans, you unhesitatingly declare your intention of doing the very reverse—when once you have the power of acting upon your own responsibility!"

"But I assure you," replied Reginald, scarcely able to articulate in his mortification and chagrin, and yet resolved on making one attempt to avert the consequence of this premature discovery of the hypocritical and deceitful line of conduct he had been pursuing, "I did not really mean half I said in that letter!"

"Indeed!" returned his uncle, dryly; "perhaps when you next write to Mr. Vernon you may see the propriety of confining yourself to what you *do* really mean."

"This is the first——" observed Reginald, in confusion.

"The first letter of yours which I have had the pleasure of perusing; *not* the first you have written."

"But I promise you, uncle——"

"I have lost my faith in your promises, sir;" sternly interposed Mr. Seymour; "months ago you promised me that you would hold no further intercourse with Edmund Hastings—did you keep your word? On the contrary, I have to-day discovered that you are now more intimate with him than ever! Then, again, regarding your debts: you solemnly assured me, only a fortnight since, that, thanks to my generosity (these were your very words), you no longer owed a single penny; whereas it would seem from this letter that you applied the money to some other purpose, and are still greatly involved—so much so, that you are only waiting until the documents which I purposed executing in your favour are formally concluded, before endeavouring to drive a bargain with some rapacious money-lenders, upon the strength of your expectations."

Reginald found this home-thrust unanswerable; therefore he hung his head, and said nothing.

"*These expectations*," added Mr. Seymour, with the air of one

whose opinion is irreversibly formed, "will, of course, from this moment cease to exist, and you will be precisely in the same position as you were before coming here—though, in consideration of the relationship which exists between us, I am willing to give you a cheque for £500, previous to your final departure. This, after what you have received, is more than you could reasonably expect me to do for you under these peculiarly aggravating circumstances."

Thus saying, he drew up his commanding figure to its fullest height, handed Reginald the letter which had so effectually opened his eyes to his perfidiousness and duplicity; and, without appearing to expect a reply, was turning to leave the room, when the door opened, and Mrs. Seymour entered.

The sight of her arrested him, and, with a withering glance of disdain, he remarked, in a significant aside,—

"I will not humiliate you by entering into any of these particulars with your aunt; the bare announcement of your approaching departure will be sufficient." "My dear," he continued, addressing his wife, "Reginald is about to leave us."

"For good?" she demanded, looking eagerly and wistfully from one to the other—her heart meanwhile fluttering betwixt hope and fear.

"Certainly," replied her husband, smiling bitterly; "he thinks his visit has lasted long enough, and wishes to be off at once."

"Indeed," said the lady, eyeing him coolly and suspiciously (she was beginning to fear some plot); "does he return to B——?"

"No; I cannot go there," hastily interposed Reginald; and as he lifted his head, Mrs. Seymour saw by the sullen cloud which overshadowed his whole countenance that his plans had been defeated "my house at B—— has been let for several months."

"That, fortunately, does not much signify," remarked his uncle, in a tone of quiet irony; "your excellent friend and adviser, Mr. Vernon, will be overjoyed to welcome you at *his* residence for as long a time as you can remain."

The young man grew furious at this. The colour flushed over his white face, and his eyes seemed literally to flash fire. He passionately clenched his hands, jumped out of his seat, and, forgetting all restraint, gave vent to his irritated feelings in a torrent of angry abuse.

Mrs. Seymour trembled at his rage, but her husband listened with the utmost calmness and indifference to all he said; merely observing in a slight mocking tone, as he paused for want of breath,—

"Pray don't hesitate to say all you think—I am quite charmed with your candour."

Reginald might probably have taken him at his word, but he suddenly remembered the £500 which his uncle promised him; and though that sum seemed to his grasping mind trifling, insignificant, and scarcely worthy of his acceptance, he would not willingly relinquish even it; making therefore a prodigious effort, he succeeded in resisting the inclination he still felt to proceed in his violent tirade against his dignified relative, and began to murmur a few unconnected words of apology for the disparaging language he had already used.

"I beg you will not give yourself the trouble of apologising," returned Mr. Seymour, smiling derisively; "for, to speak plainly, I

feel really grateful to you for affording me such a delightful view of your secret motives and sentiments. I confess I *might* have foreseen what has happened. Past experience *ought* to have taught me the absurdity of expecting you to keep faith with me. However, the wisest of us are liable to err; but it is, happily, never too late to learn, and when a man has been once deceived he becomes doubly circumspect in all his future dealings. The proverb tells us that, though the offender writes in sand, the *offended* engraves in adamant."

CHAPTER LXVI.

GOOD AND EVIL TIDINGS.

"Can you change the alterations of darkness and of light?
Can you bid revolving seasons forget to urge their flight?
Will Time his fleeting footsteps for you an instant stay,
And arrest the busy workings of his minister—decay?

Amid the rustling branches, and amid the whispering leaves,
A spirit mute, yet eloquent, ever a sad song weaves,
A-warning and admonishing, wherein in this refrain—
'Prepare for your departure; you may not here remain!'"

H. G. ADAMS.

"None are all evil. Quickening round his heart
Were yet some feelings that would not depart." BYRON.

WORDS would fail me were I to attempt to describe the intense relief which Reginald Grafton's departure from Mertonsville occasioned Mrs. Seymour.

Nor was she the only one who rejoiced at the sudden termination of his visit. The news created quite a sensation in the village, whither it rapidly spread; and many were the eager inquiries which were made, and warm congratulations exchanged between those of its inhabitants who had known and loved our hero.

"It is the Lord's doing," fervently ejaculated the pious Lisburn, when the truth was first exultingly whispered to him by Browning. "I knew that ungodly young man would not long be suffered to usurp Mr. Herbert's place!"

"Unfortunately, however, *his* going will not bring back the young squire," replied Browning, becoming serious.

"True," said Lisburn, meditatively out of his cottage window; "but it may have the effect of softening Mr. Seymour's feelings towards him."

"Never!" exclaimed Browning, emphatically; "he's far too proud and obstinate for that."

"Poor, misguided man," murmured Lisburn, with a melancholy shake of the head; "as he now sows, so he must reap hereafter."

"I think it's Mr. Herbert who ought to have our pity," observed the valet, impatiently.

"He requires it less than you imagine," answered Lisburn; "the wealth of the universe could not purchase that which he possesses."

"Yes, yes, I know," hurriedly assented Browning; "still, one cannot help contrasting his past and present circumstances, and regretting that he should, without any fault of his own, be thus brought from affluence to comparative poverty."

"Ah! these things are incomprehensible to our weak minds," mused Lisburn: "we often see the wicked in great power, and wonder how it is that *they* should be exalted, while so many of God's chosen ones,

who seem fitted to adorn the highest stations, are doomed to struggle with poverty, or——"

"What a fool that old Sir David Seymour must have been!" cried Browning, thoughtlessly interrupting the good man in the middle of his sentence.

Lisburn gazed on him in silent astonishment.

"It was *he* who first proposed to cut off the entail," explained the valet, in a tone of huge indignation.

"Oh, to be sure," returned Lisburn, an intelligent gleam passing over his countenance. "I remember hearing the particulars many years ago."

"But for him," proceeded Browning, with passionate emphasis, "Mr. Herbert might have defied his father."

"He could never feel justified in doing that," gravely responded the gardener.

"At all events, he would have been free to follow his own plans, whether Mr. Seymour approved of them or not," was Browning's somewhat tart reply.

"Well, it is useless thinking of what might have been," said Lisburn, with a melancholy smile. "The knowledge that all these trials will be overruled for his good ought to satisfy us——"

"It doesn't satisfy me," muttered Browning, knitting his brows, and walking unceremoniously out of the cottage.

He had only proceeded a step or two when he met one of the grooms, hastening in the direction of the stables.

"What's up now?" he jocularly inquired, as the man was in the act of passing him.

"Don't hinder me," he answered, without slackening his pace: "I'm off for the doctor."

"The doctor!" repeated Browning, opening his eyes in amazement; "who's ill?"

"Mrs. Seymour," briefly replied the groom: "she's in a fit!"

"A fit!" re-echoed Browning, standing like one thunderstruck: "who——"

But the groom was by this time several yards ahead of him, and, almost before he could recover from the emotion which this astounding intelligence had caused him, Browning heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs, and saw that the messenger was already on his way to the village.

Turning quickly round, therefore, the valet rapidly pursued his way to the house. There he found everything in confusion. Servants were hurrying to and fro, with frightened faces and blank, bewildered looks, whose erratic movements, and the painful uncertainty and hesitation of their manner, showed that they scarcely knew what they were doing or whither going.

"Is it true that Mrs. Seymour is ill?" he breathlessly demanded of the cook, who appeared the calmest of the whole set, excepting the butler and Mrs. Willson, neither of whom were to be seen.

"I wish I could say no," she answered in a tone of real concern.

"How did it happen?" continued Browning, after a moment's pause.

"It's not generally known yet," said Ursula coming close up to him, and lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper; "but Burns thinks it was something she saw in the paper."

"In the paper!" reiterated Browning, completely mystified: "*what* paper?"

"The newspaper, of course," she replied, evidently surprised at the obtuseness of his perceptions. "Sir William Crossley has been here, you know, and she was sitting with him and Mr. Seymour in the library when it occurred."

"Oh, I see," rejoined Browning, trying to curb his impatience. "But about the paper, Mrs. Ursula?"

"Yes, I am coming to that," she responded, in the same suppressed tone that she had hitherto employed. When the London mail arrived, Burns carried in the newspapers just as usual, and laid them upon the table. He says, Mr. Seymour took no notice of his entrance, as he was showing Sir William the plans which the architect has just sent for the tower about to be built in the east wing; but *she* opened one of the papers, and began at once to read it."

"Ah," said Browning, intensely interested.

"The next thing that Burns heard was a groan and heavy fall, and upon rushing again into the room he found the poor lady lying on the floor in a sort of fit—*her hand still grasping the newspaper.*"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Browning, now greatly excited; "can it be aught connected with Mr. Herbert?"

"There's no saying," was Ursula's ambiguous answer. "The housekeeper declares it's all nonsense, and that Mrs. Seymour's illness could not possibly be occasioned by anything she saw in the paper; but *I* think differently, and so does Burns."

"And Mrs. Willson—what is her opinion?"

"I have not had an opportunity of speaking to her on the subject; she is still in the poor lady's room."

"Has there been no return to consciousness since the attack?" asked Browning, in accents of sadness.

"None," replied the cook, going over to a large bow-window, from whence she could obtain a view of the long avenue; "we have despatched two messengers for the doctor, and are momentarily expecting his arrival. Ah! here he comes," she added, as her sharp eye detected a distant horseman. "Thank God, we shall not be kept much longer in suspense."

Half a dozen anxious attendants were ready to conduct Dr. Leslie through the spacious hall on his arrival; but their services were superseded by Mr. Seymour, who seemed also to have been on the *qui vive;* for he suddenly appeared in their midst—calm and self-possessed in manner, though he looked white and corpse-like, even to his lips—and silently accompanied the new-comer to his wife's apartment.

A small spectacled man, with a bald head, and thin, wizened face, was Dr. Leslie. He enjoyed the reputation of being remarkably clever; and Mr. Seymour had every confidence in his efficiency and skill.

After gazing with a strange expression of solemn responsibility upon the poor lady's inanimate form, he beckoned Willson to the farthest corner of the room, where he conversed with her for a few minutes in a voice inaudible to all save herself.

Then he returned to Mr. Seymour, and said abruptly,—

"You can do no good here, my dear sir. I will let you know from time to time how she is going on."

The gentleman moved his head, as if in token of assent, and softly retreated to the door; but, swiftly returning, he laid his cold hand upon the doctor's arm, and huskily exclaimed,—

"I need not conjure you to spare no trouble or expense. Get fifty doctors if you like; they shall be amply remunerated."

Dr. Leslie bowed somewhat stiffly as he replied,—

"You may depend on my doing all that is necessary."

On re-entering the library Mr. Seymour found that instead of being vacant as he had left it, it was now tenanted by Sir George Hastings, who, as one of their oldest and most valued friends, could not refrain from calling to offer his sympathy directly he heard of the gentle lady's illness.

"How is she?" was his eager question, as he came forward and wrung his friend's hand, with a face of the deepest concern, and an agitation of manner which he strove in vain to repress.

"There is no change," replied Mr. Seymour, gloomily shaking his head; "but Dr. Leslie has promised to let me know when she becomes conscious."

Thus saying he sank down in a chair, and covered his face with his hands, evidently quite incapable of uttering another word.

A long interval of silence ensued—silence which Sir George Hastings made no attempt to break, though the searching gaze of earnest and wistful inquiry he several times fastened on the afflicted husband showed that there was some point or other connected with the painful occurrence on which he wished, yet hesitated, to touch.

Mr. Seymour's mental faculties became almost paralyzed while contemplating his own grief, otherwise he must have noticed the peculiarity of Sir George's appearance.

His countenance wore an expression of intense gravity. Sorrow and reproach were both there; but above and beyond all, the deepest pity and commiseration was visible, mingled with a look of curious bewilderment and half-doubtful perplexity.

Once Mr. Seymour lifted his head and listened, as the sound of muffled voices was heard outside the door, but presently they ceased, and with a sigh he resumed his former position.

Considerably more than half an hour must have passed before the doctor joined them. When he came he said little, and that little was not calculated to remove their fears.

"Yes; she is to a certain extent conscious," he observed, in answer to their anxious inquiries; "though she has neither spoken to nor recognised any one as yet."

"Can I go to her?" asked Mr. Seymour, moving towards the door.

"Certainly not," was the curt reply; "the least excitement would kill her."

Mr. Seymour returned to his seat without another word.

"Can you inform me what led to this?" said the doctor, addressing him in a calm, business-like tone. "My partner agrees with me in attributing this serious attack to some sudden mental shock which the patient has sustained."

"You must be in error," replied Mr. Seymour, rousing himself, and speaking in a tone of grave surprise.

"I am not in the habit of stating an opinion until convinced of its correctness, sir," returned the pungent little doctor, bridling at the idea of such an indignity being offered to his professional sagacity.

"You entirely misunderstand me," interposed Mr. Seymour, in a conciliatory tone. "I merely meant to assure you that Mrs. Seymour had not been in the slightest degree excited or annoyed previous to her attack."

"It's very singular," murmured the doctor, compressing his lips, and rubbing his sallow forehead reflectively; "I find it difficult to ascribe it to any other cause. If I am rightly informed," he added, turning to Mr. Seymour, and resuming his usual courteous bearing, "she seemed in her usual health until the very last moment."

"Precisely so," answered Mr. Seymour, in a voice that quivered in spite of his wonderful self-command; "she was sitting in this very room, talking with our old friend Crossley."

"In her customary spirits," insinuated the other.

"Certainly," was the haughty reply.

"Some one mentioned to me, that she had been reading the newspaper," remarked Dr. Leslie, "and I inferred——"

"The newspaper!" involuntarily echoed Sir George Hastings, as he started forward, with a face of excessive agitation, and signed to the doctor to be silent.

"It is quite true," responded Mr. Seymour, without observing the singularity of his friend's behaviour; "she must have taken it up about five minutes before the commencement of her illness, as it was found in her hand."

"Ha!" ejaculated Dr. Leslie, apparently too full of his own ideas to understand the meaning of Sir George's gesticulations. "If we could get a sight of it," he went on, casting an exploratory glance around the large and magnificently furnished apartment," it *might* throw some light on the subject."

"Well, we will see," said Mr. Seymour, unbelievingly: "it is doubtless among these."

Saying which, he retreated to a side table, and began to turn over the various newspapers which were scattered over it, seeking for the one he wanted.

No sooner was his back turned than Sir George brought his pantomimic gestures to a climax by abruptly seizing the doctor's arm so forcibly that he could with difficulty restrain his indignation, and exclaiming in a quick, beseeching voice,—

"For God's sake, say no more on this matter, Leslie."

"Why not?" he answered, gazing at him in visible amazement. "I never like working in the dark, if I can help it; and so convinced am I——"

"*I* can give you the information you desire," interrupted the baronet.

"*You*, sir?" in unfeigned wonder.

"Yes;" and, drawing a step nearer, he stooped, and whispered a few words in the doctor's ear.

"Most unfortunate," murmured the latter, gravely shaking his head, "*most* unfortunate! And he," indicating Mr. Seymour by a look, "is as yet in ignorance?"

"Evidently," rejoined Sir George, mournfully directing his eyes towards his miserable friend; "and the longer he remains so the better. At present he is full of anxiety regarding his wife."

"Not without reason," rejoined Dr. Leslie, with meaning emphasis.

Sir George started, and would have questioned him more closely,

but almost before the words were spoken Mr. Seymour returned to them.

To his friend's unspeakable relief he had not succeeded in finding the paper.

"I remember taking it out of my wife's hand," he said, "and putting it, as I thought, upon the table; but it is certainly not here—perhaps it will be in her own room."

"Oh, it's of no consequence," replied Dr. Leslie, earnestly, though in some confusion (he was now as anxious to lull suspicion as he had before seemed to awaken it). "I hope you will excuse me for appearing for a moment unsatisfied with your first explanation. I am quite ready to admit that we should gain nothing by following the course I unadvisedly suggested."

Having uttered these words in a tone of marked respect, Dr. Leslie slowly crossed the room for the purpose of rejoining his assistant in the sick chamber.

Mr. Seymour followed, and detaining him for an instant on the threshold, asked wistfully,—

"You do not apprehend any danger?"

"Why should you think so?" he answered, evasively.

Ere the question could be repeated, he was gone!

CHAPTER LXVII.

ALONE WITH THE DEAD.

"We shape *ourselves* the joy or fear
Of which life to come is made;
We fill our future's atmosphere
With sunshine or with shade.
The tissue of the life to be
We weave with colours all *our own;*
And in the field of destiny
We *reap as we have sown.*" J. G. WHITTIER.

"When pitiless misfortune's night
Frowns darkest o'er the head,
Where will we find a gleam of light
To dissipate the dread?" CHARLES MOIR.

FOR a week Mrs. Seymour's case seemed to defy all human skill.

Then a change took place in the aspect of her complaint; the most alarming symptoms subsided, and Dr. Leslie began to entertain hopes of her speedy and complete restoration to health.

Still, she made very little progress in regaining strength. Day succeeded to day, and night to night, and yet she continued as helpless as an infant, never evincing the slightest interest in anything which took place around her, or opening her lips to address her faithful attendant Willson, who, in spite of her age and increasing infirmities, had insisted on being permitted to undertake the labour and responsibility of nursing her beloved mistress.

At last came the crisis—startling and overwhelming to every inmate of the mansion.

During one of Dr. Leslie's visits to the sick room, the door of the library (where Mr. Seymour now spent the greatest part of his time) was flung violently open, and Juliet came rushing up to him with wild affrighted looks, exclaiming in accents of terror and consternation,—

"O sir, my mistress."

"What of your mistress, girl?" fiercely demanded the gentleman, striding towards the door.

"O sir, she is——"

"What?" he asked, roughly grasping her by the arm. "Speak!"

"Dead!" gasped the terror-stricken girl, breaking from him, and bursting into a torrent of tears.

Mr. Seymour staggered giddily forward, and only saved himself from falling by leaning his whole weight against the door-post.

For several seconds he remained there, speechless, spell-bound, with a face of mortal paleness, and an expression of the keenest anguish affixed to every feature. The blood coursed coldly through his veins, and the pulsations of his heart seemed to have stopped.

But suddenly a doubt crossed his brain, and, like a drowning man

catching at a straw, he eagerly embraced it, and was thereby enabled to proceed with moderately firm footsteps to his wife's apartment.

A melancholy spectacle awaited him in that sombrous chamber!

Everything bore testimony to the truth of Juliet's report, from the group of weeping servants who were gathered around the doorway, to the grave and strangely perturbed expression of Dr. Leslie's face, as he hastened forward to prevent him, if possible, from coming farther than the threshold.

By an authoritative gesture, Mr. Seymour waved him back, and, stepping up to the bed, drew aside the curtain, and gazed upon the silent form it contained.

As he did so, his cheek blanched with horror, and all his former forebodings presented themselves before him in a darker and still more terrible array. *Now* he beheld *not* the mere threatening phantom, or the gloomy shadow of some impending evil, but the awful and hideous reality itself!

"Why was I not informed of this sooner?" he demanded, turning to the doctor after a long pause, and speaking in that tone of unnatural calmness which is indicative of the uttermost despair.

"There was no time," he answered, regarding him in genuine sadness and compassion; "it passed almost in a moment; a sudden spasm seemed to convulse the poor lady's frame, and before I could even ascertain its cause she had ceased to breathe."

A half-articulated groan was Mr. Seymour's only response.

"I little anticipated this," continued the doctor, mournfully fixing his eyes upon the white satin counterpane; "it is indeed a peculiarly distressing event; but it was one of those mysterious cases which no human foresight could possibly have averted. All that remains for me, therefore, is to express my profound sympathy; and assure you——"

"That will do, sir," interrupted Mr. Seymour, a look of agony passing over his countenance; "it is impossible for you, or any one else, to enter into my feelings."

"True," answered the doctor, with a deprecating gesture; "still——" He left his sentence unfinished, on perceiving that the person for whose ears it was intended had already quitted the room.

Slowly and totteringly he, Mr. Seymour, retraced his steps to the library; and having secured himself from intrusion by turning the key in the lock, he sank down upon the nearest chair, outwardly calm and rigid as the sculptured figures of his ancestors (which were ranged, about a yard from each other, in recesses built for their reception, between the tall ebony book-cases which lined the immense apartment), though a prey to the most poignant anguish and acute mental sufferings.

Hours wore away, but he was quite unconscious of their flight; and no thought of the many painful duties which required his immediate attention came to rouse his grief-distracted mind from the exclusive contemplation of what had so recently occurred.

The servants meanwhile were sorely perplexed how to act.

Some of the most intimate friends of the family called to offer their services directly they heard of the distressing event. None of them were admitted, however, until the evening, when Sir George Hastings, whom the intelligence had only just reached, made his appearance at the Park.

"O sir, I am so glad *you* are come," said the old butler, drawing him into the darkened and deserted dining-room; "everything is in such confusion, and we are afraid to take any steps regarding the funeral until we have the master's authority for doing so."

Here the old man leant upon the table, and, in spite of his efforts at self-command, was wholly unable to keep up even the semblance of composure.

Sir George was himself scarcely less affected, and for several minutes they were both silent from intensity of feeling.

Rousing himself at length, the baronet passed his handkerchief across his eyes, and asked, in a voice which trembled with emotion,—

"Has Mr. Seymour given no orders?"

"No, sir," replied the old man, in a hoarse whisper; "he has been shut up in his library ever since it happened."

"I wonder if he would see me," mused Sir George.

"I fear not, sir, for Browning has made several attempts in the course of the day to gain his attention by knocking at the library door, but without receiving any reply."

"Ah!" said Sir George, reflectively; adding, after a moment's consideration, "if you will bring me writing materials, I will see what can be done."

He was promptly obeyed; and the first use he made of them was to write a short note to Mr. Seymour, in which he delicately offered to relieve him from the task of ordering the funeral arrangements, etc.; and merely requested him to mention the names of such relations as he particularly wished to be invited on the melancholy occasion.

This note he entrusted to Browning, desiring him to embrace the earliest opportunity of delivering it to his master.

Accordingly the valet made another effort to attract Mr. Seymour's notice; but, failing as before, he proceeded, as a *dernier ressort*, to insert the letter underneath the door.

This experiment was successful; for Mr. Seymour's eyes being at that moment fixed upon the ground, he could not well avoid seeing it.

With a slight contraction of his brow, he lifted it, and, just as he was impatiently throwing it aside, he recognised the handwriting, and, altering his purpose, opened it, and glanced over its contents.

His lip quivered painfully as he did so, and for a short time it seemed as if he would faint, so terrible was his agitation.

But presently he rose, and, taking a sheet of paper from the table, hurriedly traced a few lines on it, folded it, pushed it outside the door, in the same manner in which Browning had conveyed the one from Sir George; and then, to ensure its being delivered at once, he rang the bell.

Browning instantly reappeared, and, perceiving the note lying on the floor, picked it up, and carried it to the dining-room.

On reading it, Sir George found that his kind offer was thankfully accepted; but, greatly to his surprise (knowing his friend's characteristic love of display), Mr. Seymour expressed a very decided wish to have everything arranged in the quietest manner. No expense was to be spared; but at the same time he requested that none of his relations should be invited to attend the funeral. He could not endure the thought of meeting them, he said, under such distressing circumstances, and hoped Sir George would not consider it necessary to expose him to any needless pain.

A memorandum of his wife's death was enclosed, which, at his own suggestion, Sir George copied and sent to be inserted in the *Times* and other newspapers.

* * * * * *

The evening of the third day arrived; and nearly all the preparations for Mrs. Seymour's funeral were completed.

The coffin, with its gorgeous covering of crimson velvet and white satin lining, stood in the deceased lady's dressing-room, waiting for its occupant, whose name and age were engraved on a silver plate, which had been fastened on the centre of the lid, and neatly surrounded with two rows of small pearls.

The women servants had already assumed their mourning dresses, the guests (few in number) had received their invitations, the clergyman the usual instructions, the undertaker his orders.

Nothing, therefore, of any importance remained to be done—nothing but the last sad consignment of "earth to earth, ashes to ashes."

One solitary watcher sat with clasped hands, and a pale, agonized face, in that mysterious chamber—an aged, bowed-down woman, whose tearless grief seemed almost more than her feeble frame was able to endure.

In vain the pitying servants had, time after time, implored her to take some rest. In vain her wearied body and exhausted mind warned her that nature could not long sustain the accumulated load of unrelieved anguish which every day weighed heavier and heavier upon her gentle spirit—it was all of no avail! She felt that when her beloved mistress expired, the spring of earthly hope had suddenly dried up within her own breast. She had no further object in life—nothing to care for—no one to cling to, and cherish, and watch over, and pray for; and her only desire now was (amounting almost to an eager, passionate longing), that she, too, might be permitted to close her eyes upon this weary world, and sleep the sleep of death!

These were her thoughts, as she kept watch in the silent chamber, wherein reposed the moveless form of her once blooming and beautiful mistress.

To a timorous mind, the awful, grave-like stillness that reigned throughout the dwelling, after all the servants had retired to rest, would have been quite appalling; but Willson had no superstitious dread of remaining alone with the dead; and when Juliet (much against her personal inclination) offered to share her nightly vigils, she unhesitatingly rejected the proposal.

About half an hour elapsed, and then the pale watcher heard—as it were without perceiving—the opening and shutting of a door, followed by stealthy footsteps ascending the stairs.

An instant's pause took place outside the room she was in, but presently the handle was noiselessly turned, and Mr. Seymour glided like a ghost into the middle of the floor.

He evidently expected to find no one there, and had purposely chosen this hour as being the one when he could without observation pay a last farewell visit to his wife's remains.

In his hand he carried a lamp, and having placed it upon a table which stood near the bed, he cast a hurried glance around the apartment.

The light of the two wax candles burning on the mantelshelf was scarcely sufficient to reveal every object distinctly.

He did not, therefore, notice Mrs. Willson for several seconds, as she was partially hidden by the draperies of one of the windows ; but when at length his eye lighted on her, he started back, with every appearance of consternation and annoyance.

A second glance, however, removed his uneasiness. Her eyes were fixed, not on himself, but the ground, and the expression of mute agony and stony, passionless despair, which seemed stamped upon her pallid countenance, showed that there was no room in her heart for idle curiosity or useless investigation into the thoughts and feelings of another.

"She is wholly absorbed in her grief," was Mr. Seymour's mental conclusion, after gazing at her for a short time, and seeing no change in her demeanour. And turning from her he leant over the bed of his gentle wife—his chest meanwhile heaving convulsively at the remembrance of his own great loss.

For full ten minutes he remained in the same attitude; a few moans of deep but smothered anguish giving evidence from time to time of the exquisite suffering he was enduring.

At last he drew back a step or two—pressed his hand to his forehead with a gesture of pain—sighed heavily—and, again leaning forward, kissed the lady's cold white brow; after which he disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

In a minute he returned, and, going up to Willson, laid his trembling hand upon her shoulder, saying, in a low, quivering voice,—

"Why do you remain here, my good Willson? Go and rest."

"Rest!" repeated the old woman, raising her eyes, and fixing them dreamingly upon his face—"what have *I* to say to rest?"

"You will kill yourself," continued Mr. Seymour, struck with the utter hopelessness of her tone.

"Why should I wish to survive *her?*" she answered, pointing gloomily towards the bed.

An additional shade of pallor overspread Mr. Seymour's cheek at this allusion to the departed; and it was in a scarcely articulated whisper that he responded,—

"*Your* suffering cannot recall her to life, Willson."

"I know it—oh! I know it!" exclaimed the faithful creature, with a startling change of voice and manner. "My mistress! my gentle, broken-hearted mistress!" she wailed, lifting her withered hands to her face, and rocking herself to and fro: "would God I had died for thee!"

Mr. Seymour shuddered, and set his teeth firmly together, as she uttered these words of undesigned reproach; but before he could answer her she had burst into a flood of hysterical weeping, and he became really alarmed for her life, when he saw the agitation which shook her aged frame, and found that all his attempts to soothe and console her were entirely thrown away.

"This will never do," he murmured; "I think I must call up some of the servants. Or, stay," he added glancing helplessly aronnd him; "a glass of wine might possibly revive her."

He could see nothing of the kind in the room, however, and, nervously taking the lamp from the table, he once more left her alone.

He came back presently with a decanter half filled with port wine in

his hand, and, hastily pouring out a glass, tried to induce her to swallow it.

He could not succeed; but, from the strenuous efforts Willson made to regain her composure, it was evident that she both noticed his distress, and felt grateful for the attention.

Directly she was able to speak, she begged him to leave her; and after telling her that he had no intention of retiring to rest that night, and making her promise to come to him if she wanted anything, Mr. Seymour slowly withdrew.

Her tears continued to flow long after his departure; but they now spoke more of gentleness and resignation than passionate despair.

Her short interview with Mr. Seymour had shown her that, however intense her own anguish, it was far less than his.

The bitterest ingredient in his suffering she was spared.

She sorrowed—that was all!

He also sorrowed, but his sorrow was equalled in severity—yea, swallowed up in a great and terrible remorse.

* * * * *

It was two hours past midnight.

The wax lights were gradually burning lower and lower upon the mantelshelf of Mrs. Seymour's room, while the rest of the house still seemed to be wrapped in profound slumber.

Willson was on her knees. Like Noah's dove, she had returned at length to her true Refuge. Conscious of her own great weakness, she was eagerly clinging to the Rock of Ages, and trying amidst blinding tears and a bleeding heart to say, "The will of the Lord be done."

By-and-by she arose, feeling calmer and more submissive; though the painful sense of lassitude and weariness that crept over heart and body made her painfully alive to the fact of her increasing weakness, and the absolute necessity there was for her to seek some kind of repose.

Accordingly she drew a small shawl which she wore closer around her, and sitting down in a low chair, leant back, and closed her eyes, hoping to obtain, not sleep, but a few minutes of quiet and undisturbed meditation—a brief respite from the numberless harassing and perplexing ideas which had hitherto kept her mind in a state of excruciating torture.

She had remained in this position perhaps ten minutes when, amid the solemn silence that everywhere prevailed, a sudden sound, resembling that of a person drawing a lengthened inspiration, apparently proceeding from the bed, reached her ear.

"I must certainly be dreaming," thought she, rubbing her eyes, and sitting bolt upright in her chair.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

A WONDERFUL CHANGE.

"Whene'er the fate of those I hold most dear
Tells to my fearful breast a tale of sorrow,
O bright-eyed Hope! my morbid fancy cheer;
Let me awhile thy sweetest comforts borrow."

KEATS.

"Didst thou not close that expiring eye,
And feel the soft pulse decay!
And did not thy lips receive the sigh,
Which bore her soul away?"

"He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder."

FOR the space of a few seconds, the sound which had startled Mrs. Willson was not repeated, and she tried to persuade herself that it was nothing more than the effect of her own imagination.

Still she sat erect, listening with straining ear, suspended breath, and throbbing heart, in case she might be mistaken.

Again it came,—that long, deep sighing sound!

It was no illusion of the senses this time, no mere fanciful conjecture, but a fact,—clear, positive, and convincing!

As I said before, Willson was not superstitious. Nevertheless, she felt a strange thrill of apprehension run through her frame; her limbs trembled, a cold perspiration broke out upon her forehead, and her cheeks were overspread with a damp and leaden paleness.

She essayed to rise from her seat, but at the first attempt fell back again, as if the effort had paralyzed her, and it was only when the mysterious sound was repeated for the third time, that she succeeded in shaking off the spell of terror which had arrested her, and rushing to the mantelshelf, lifted one of the candles, and advanced with it in her hand to the side of the bed.

When she got there, she started like one struck by lightning—a sickly faintness made her knees shake, and every muscle of her face quivered with irrepressible emotion.

One glance showed her that some great and inexplicable change had taken place in the supposed corpse.

The last time she gazed at it, the eyes were fast shut; but *now!*—could she indeed credit the evidence of her senses?—she beheld them wide open; and, as she stood rooted to the spot, continuing to regard it in awe-stricken bewilderment (still half inclined to believe that she was the subject of some extraordinary hallucination of the brain), she saw one of the hands slowly move towards her, while the quivering eyelids and convulsive movements which agitated the poor lady's body seemed to speak of returning animation.

"Can I be going mad?" gasped Willson, dropping the wax light (which fortunately went out without doing any mischief) upon the

floor, and putting her hand to her head with a wearied, pained expression.

Again she roused herself, and, conquering her dread, relighted the candle, and leaned over the bed, in order to ascertain as near as possible precisely how matters stood with her unfortunate mistress.

As she did so, the eyes which had so recently seemed sealed in death were turned full upon her, with an expression of undoubted recognition; and the pale lips made a tremulous effort to speak!

For an instant Willson's heart stood still. Then—as a sudden idea, which appeared wild and extravagant even to her own excited mind, dawned upon her—it gave a great bound. Her overstrained feelings experienced a strange and startling revulsion; *joy* once more revisited her desolate breast, and

> "Sweet Hope celestial influence round her shed,
> Waving its silvery pinions o'er her head."

Without a moment's hesitation, Willson opened a tall rosewood press, and after bringing from thence several down coverlets, and heaping them upon the bed, she seized the poor lady's hands, and tried by chafing them to assist in restoring the circulation to her ex-animate frame.

It was no easy task; still she persevered; and felt herself amply rewarded when another lengthened inspiration, quickly followed by a scarcely perceptible pressure of the hand, showed that her exertions were not in vain.

Presently she remembered the wine which Mr. Seymour had brought for herself, and though she shrank from the responsibility of administering it without the doctor's sanction, yet the urgency of the case—the absolute impossibility of her leaving the room even to call Mr. Seymour, and the chance, almost certainty, that unless some kind of nourishment was immediately taken the poor lady must perish from sheer exhaustion—decided her on trying the experiment.

She proceeded, however, with the utmost caution, commencing by merely moistening the parched lips from time to time with the wine; and when she saw that it brought a faint tinge of colour to the ghastly cheek, she gradually increased the quantity, until the first glass was emptied.

Then Mrs. Seymour's eyes seemed to ask for more; but, ere she ventured to pour out a second glass, the anxious nurse waited to note the effect of what had already been taken.

Again she saw the trembling lips unclose and try to speak, and by bending her ear close she caught the words,—"*Very weak.*"

A thrill of rapturous pleasure, such as Willson had rarely, perhaps never before experienced, shot through her heart at this faintly uttered whisper. She was incapable of making any reply, but clasping her withered hands together in the fulness of her joy, she raised her eyes gratefully towards heaven.

Another slight movement arrested her, and again leaning forward, she heard the same feeble voice asking,—

"Have I been long ill?"

"Pray God the past may never return to her recollection," mentally aspirated Willson.

"Don't talk, my dear mistress," she said, in a tender, soothing tone; "you will soon be better, I hope."

Mrs. Seymour did not make any further attempt to speak, but lay for some time perfectly still, exhibiting no other signs of remaining consciousness except such as might be implied by her obediently receiving the wine which was given her at regular intervals.

Willson became now extremely anxious to send off for Dr. Leslie. More than once she had been on the point of ringing the bell for assistance, but she knew that the smallest excitement would instantly extinguish the spark of life, which could hardly yet be said to be rekindled in the poor lady's frame, and feared she might be unable to prevent her from hearing some of the ejaculations of incredulity, wonder, and alarm, which would be sure to follow the unexpected announcement of her truly miraculous preservation.

When she had allowed her to take as much wine as she dared under the circumstances, Willson felt her hands and feet, and, after wrapping the clothes more closely around her, she bent down, and said, in a soft motherly tone,—

"I am going away for a few minutes, my darling."

Mrs. Seymour languidly opened her eyes, and fixed them quite sensibly upon the old woman's face. She did, not, however, at first understand her, but on the words being repeated, she moved her hand, and softly touched one of Willson's, which happened to be lying on the coverlet.

"You will not move until I return?" pleaded Willson, in the gentlest of gentle tones.

Mrs. Seymour's lips formed a voiceless "*No.*"

And the affectionate old woman, apparently relieved from all present apprehensions regarding her beloved mistress, lighted another candle, and softly left the apartment.

Rapidly, albeit with agitated footsteps, she threaded the long winding passages, until she reached that remote wing of the building which was occupied by the servants.

Here she paused, and communed with herself for one moment, murmuring meanwhile, in a low, suppressed voice,—

"Yes, it must be him, I suppose—Burns is too old and methodical, the footman too young and pompous, but *he*, though inexperienced and excitable, is in the main exceedingly good-natured and unselfish, besides being far quicker in his movements.

Thus saying, she gently turned the handle of one of the doors. It yielded to her touch, and, after reclosing it, she shaded the light with her hand, and stole on tiptoe to the farthest end of the room.

This apartment contained two beds; one being occupied by a footman, the second by Mr. Seymour's valet.

Willson's great fear was, that in endeavouring to awaken the one, she should disturb the other also.

Neither of them stirred at her entrance; so putting the candle down, she proceeded, *sans ceremonie*, to give Browning a vigorous shake; and finding that he continued to sleep as uninterruptedly as before, she was obliged to repeat it several times.

"What's the matter?" he cried out at length, starting up, and rubbing his eyes with all his might. "Who in the name of fortune are you, and——"

"Hush!" whispered Willson, laying her hand upon his lips, and pointing to his companion's bed; "listen to me, and don't utter one syllable."

Browning gaped at her in silent bewilderment.

"You know me now?" she breathed in his ear.

The young man nodded, trying at the same time to shake off the hand which still kept guard over his mouth.

"Would you wish to do me service?" pursued Willson, in the aforesaid low tone; "one that I shall thank you for until I cease to breathe?"

"Try me," gurgled Browning.

"Get up at once, then—don't wait to dress; but just throw on a few of your clothes, and then come to me—you will find me outside the door. Above all things, make no noise!"

Almost before the words were spoken Browning had sprung out of bed, and was hastily thrusting himself into one of his garments.

He was thoroughly awake now; and seeing by Willson's strangely excited countenance that something unusual had happened, he felt most anxious to ascertain how he could serve her.

Scarcely two minutes elapsed ere he joined her in the passage.

"Ah! that's right!" she said, on observing that he carried his boots in his hand. "Now follow me without a word."

He obeyed; and, having led the way to one of the back staircases, she swiftly descended, and then, greatly to Browning's surprise, entered a wide gallery at the rear of the building, which was now never used; and, pausing at the upper end, touched a spring in the wall, when suddenly a door swung back upon its rusty hinges with a harsh, creaking sound, revealing a narrow passage, at the end of which was another door.

"Where *are* we going?" demanded Browning, unable longer to restrain his curiosity.

"Don't stop to ask questions," was Willson's answer; "I'll tell you all you want to know another day. Just listen to me now. That door will admit you into the stables."

"The stables!" ejaculated Browning; "why——"

"What I want you to do is this," hurriedly interrupted the old woman; "take out one of the horses without stopping to awaken the grooms, and ride off for your life to Dr. Leslie; will you do this?"

"Certainly," said the young man, going forward a step.

"Tell him to come here instantly," she continued; "*instantly*."

"Who shall I say is ill?" asked Browning, puzzled beyond measure at her agitated manner; "is it him?" meaning Mr. Seymour.

"No; but Browning"—she hesitated, though only for a second—"can I trust you?"

"I hope so," he returned, somewhat impatiently.

"Well, you shall tell him the truth, in order that he may know what he ought to bring with him. Say that if he comes immediately he may yet save my mistress's life."

"Ah! I see how it is," muttered Browning, starting back, and regarding her in unfeigned compassion; "I *knew* something would happen to you, if you would persist in sitting up night after night in that——"

"*Will* you listen to me?" asked Willson, a look of agony crossing her face.

"Oh! certainly," said the other, awed by her tone of eager entreaty.

"I solemnly assure you, then, that I left her alive five minutes ago."

Browning uttered an exclamation of concentrated bewilderment.

"I heard her sigh three times, and when I looked at her, I found that her eyes were wide open, and one of her hands had moved from the position it was in all the day. Since that, I have been giving her some wine, and she is now quite conscious; but her weakness is so great, that unless you can get the doctor to come at once, it will be of no use."

All this was said with the utmost rapidity, but in a voice of such deep solemnity and undoubted sincerity, that Browning felt staggered.

"Wine!" he repeated, seizing on that as the most tangible part of her communication; "are you certain she has been taking wine?"

"Quite," responded Willson, with a groan; "but while you are talking here, she may be dying for want of medical advice."

"Well, I'll go," said Browning, energetically. "There can be no harm in humouring her," he murmured to himself, as he slipped back the sliding door which admitted him into the stable.

"The doctor is needed—that's evident! for even if this story about Mrs. Seymour turns out to be a mistake, as I very much fear will be the case, still it will only prove how greatly poor Willson requires his attendance on her own account."

The latter retraced her steps, directly she got rid of Browning, and, going to the kitchen, she filled two large foot-warmers with boiling water, and carried them to Mrs. Seymour's chamber.

She found the lady's hands and feet still cold, but not colder than when she had last felt them; and, in other respects, her condition seemed precisely the same as before—neither better nor worse.

The hot water soon had the desired effect of diffusing a gentle and natural heat throughout the system; and Willson, on thus discovering to her infinite relief that the measures hitherto adopted had been successful, no longer hesitated to repeat the doses of port wine.

A complete revolution had now taken place in the old woman's appearance, no less than her feelings. Her face, though still thin and worn, was lighted up with inexpressible happiness; the flush of excitement had replaced the deadly pallor of her cheek, and instead of wishing to *die*, her constant prayer was that she might *live*.

Her feebleness and exhaustion were now forgotten, or, if remembered, only to render her eager in adopting every means towards regaining her strength, for the purpose of enabling her to resume her loving ministrations in the sick room.

Once she actually stole into an adjoining apartment, where she knew she should find some refreshments, which the good-natured Juliet had insisted on carrying there the previous evening, hoping she might be tempted to partake of them; and after forcing herself to swallow a morsel of meat, she returned, and, hastilly pouring out a glass of wine, drank it with the greatest avidity.

This done, she softly closed the door of Mrs. Seymour's dressing-room, which was slightly ajar, locked it, and put the key in her pocket, and then, seeing from the patient's quiet and comparatively easy position that she did not require any further attention for the present, she embraced the opportunity thus afforded her of going to arouse the housekeeper, whose assistance she thought might ere long be needed.

CHAPTER LXIX.

THE LONDON PHYSICIAN.

"The darkest night that shrouds the sky,
Of beauty hath a share;
The blackest heart hath signs to tell
That God still lingers there." ROBERT NICOLL.

"Envy not greatness, for thou mak'st thereby
Thyself the worse, and so the distance greater."
GEO. HERBERT.

"Can jealous fear truth's dauntless heart enthrall?
Suspicion lurks not in the heart of truth." BEATTIE.

WILLSON found it somewhat difficult to make Mrs. Morby comprehend what had occurred—the phlegmatic temperament of that matter-of-fact individual rendering her far less susceptible than Browning, and more obstinate in questioning and contradicting the accuracy of her reiterated assertions.

"Depend upon it, you have been dreaming," was her slighting remark, as Willson concluded her hurried narration; "such things never happen now-a-days, I assure you!"

"Very well," replied the old woman, moving despairingly toward the door, "if you *won't* believe me, I can't help it. I came to you first, thinking that your experience might be able to suggest something——"

"My experience!" interrupted the housekeeper, with a scornful laugh; "it has not yet taught me how to recall the dead to life."

"None but the Lord can do that," solemnly rejoined Willson; "I fancied, however, that by informing you of what is going on, we should be able to do away with the necessity of calling up any of the other servants previous to the doctor's arrival, but——"

"The doctor!" repeated Morby, opening her cold eyes in perplexity; "surely you have not sent for him?"

"Indeed, I am thankful to say I have—he may be here any moment."

"The old fool!" mentally aspirated Mrs. Morby; "she is evidently quite insane. Nevertheless, I should be playing my cards very badly were I to offend *her;* I suppose, therefore, I must humour her for the time."

"Stay," she exclaimed in a conciliatory tone, when she saw that Willson was really leaving the room; "you must excuse me, my good friend, for being rather slow in believing what you tell me—it seems so extraordinary."

"Of course it does," briefly replied the other; "but it's true for all that."

"Would you mind explaining it to me again?" blandly continued the housekeeper, fixing her small glassy eyes upon the old woman's agitated face. "Just begin from the beginning, if you please, for I am afraid I was too sleepy to take in all you said."

"I can't stay long," returned Willson, coming back to the bedside; "but in a few words I'll repeat what I told you before, and then if you refuse to help me, I must get Juliet."

Mrs. Morby's object, in requesting her to do this, was simply to gain time, in order that she might resolve on the most politic course of action.

Nevertheless, she listened with the utmost attention to Willson's repetition of the marvellous manner in which their mistress had been restored from apparent death to life, and gradually incredulity was changed into doubt, doubt into wonder and amazement, and these, again, into a firm conviction of the truth of the old woman's statement.

As this conclusion forced itself upon her mind, every straight line in her calm, cold face became suddenly and closely compressed; the eyes; which had hitherto been unflinchingly rivetted on Willson's countenance, were hastily and somewhat confusedly withdrawn; and for a short time she seemed to have lost the power of making any reply.

These marks of perturbation would have revealed to a sharp-sighted observer that of which Willson in her simplicity was in happy ignorance. She, kind, unsuspecting soul, never doubted that her news, when once believed, would prove a source of the greatest happiness to others, no less than herself. Instead, therefore, of being chilled and disgusted by the ominous silence that followed her communication, she attributed it solely and entirely to excess of joy on the part of Mrs. Morby; and, as such, she respected it.

How would she have turned from her with horror and loathing, had her heart at that moment been laid bare before her—had she seen the surging tide of passions which rose and fell beneath the rigid exterior, and known how many and conflicting were the emotions which chased themselves in rapid succession through her mind! Pride, selfishness, ambition, and covetousness—*these* were the *hidden* features of her character, though political and self-interested motives often made her appear in a very different light.

I do not mean to insinuate that Mrs. Seymour's death had occasioned the housekeeper pleasure, No. When the melancholy announcement was first made, she felt really shocked and grieved; for the gentle lady had always been a kind and indulgent mistress, and none but a thoroughly hardened wretch *could* have experienced anything but regret at her loss.

But she had by this time become accustomed to the new order of things, and, almost without being conscious of the fact, she allowed herself to dwell upon certain consequences which would probably follow this break in Mr. Seymour's home—consequences by no means undesirable so far as she was concerned—and weave dreams of future prosperity (in which *she*, of course, was the person benefited), until in imagination she already fancied herself in possession of the coveted good.

She was now a more important personage than ever, she thought; for, knowing Mr. Seymour's dislike to changes, as well as his liberality in money matters, she concluded that he would be most anxious for her to retain her situation, and preside over the domestic arrangements of the establishment; and not only did she expect to be treated with increased respect by the inferior servants, and derive advantages too numerous to mention, from being thus freed from the occasional

supervision which even a nominal mistress may be supposed to exercise, but she also intended to take the first opportunity of representing to Mr. Seymour the additional labour and responsibility of her present position, nothing doubting that, by skilful management ("and who," was her complacent mental query, "who can manage these delicate affairs more judiciously than myself?") she would get him to agree to further her wishes by adding very considerably to the large salary she had hitherto been in the habit of receiving.

Willson's news, therefore, came like a thunder-clap upon her, instantly extinguishing all the hopes and expectations which had been engendered in her ambitious mind, overthrowing her schemes of independence, self-ease, and aggrandisement, and reducing her once more to her own level. She made a laudable attempt to disguise her feelings, but she could not for a time trust herself to speak.

"What do you wish me to do?" she asked, beginning at length, worldly-wise woman as she was, to consider that she had better accept her fate with resignation, instead of rebelling against what she could not help.

"That I leave to your own discretion," replied Willson; "if you can arrange matters so as to keep the house quiet for a while, I should be thankful, as I do not wish Mr. Seymour to know what is going on until the doctor has been here."

"Quite right," assented Mrs. Morby, hastily proceeding with her dressing; it would be cruel to awaken his hopes, unless Dr. Leslie gives us reason to suppose she will really recover.

"Oh! she *must*," exclaimed Willson, clasping her hands together.

"No doubt you are the best judge of that," dryly responded Mrs. Morby; but, as if ashamed of her words, she added the next instant, in a subdued tone," at all events we will hope so."

"I must return to her now," said Willson; "perhaps you will bring the doctor upstairs when he comes, and then you can see her yourself. I should be afraid to run the risk of admitting Juliet; but you are always so calm and collected, that there is no fear of *your* exciting her."

"I trust not, indeed," returned the housekeeper, with a complacent smile. "By the bye," she exclaimed, just as Willson was going out at the door, "you are forgetting Browning; how in the world am I to keep him quiet?"

"Ah! we must give him strict injunctions," said Willson; and then she stopped and listened.

"Do you hear anything?" demanded Mrs. Morby.

"Yes, I am sure they are coming up the avenue," was the quick response. "Are you ready?"

"All but my cap," replied her companion, seizing it as she spoke, and placing it upon her head. "Now let us go and meet them."

Everything appeared calm and beautiful in the grey morning light, as they went and undid the heavy fastenings of one of the outer doors, and looked eagerly across the lawn.

Willson's anxiety to find out whether Browning had succeeded in persuading the doctor to accompany him was intense, until to her great joy she discovered *two* figures advancing rapidly toward them —Browning having with unusual consideration insisted on leaving the horses a short distance from the house, lest the noise at their arrival should be heard by those within.

The little man was flushed and excited; such an extraordinary

occurrence had never happened to him before, and as yet he could neither understand nor believe it.

He took off his hat in the hall, and passed his handkerchief several times over his bald head; but when he would have stopped to interrogate Willson, she shook her head, and, with an impatient gesture, signified her wish that he should proceed at once to Mrs. Seymour's apartment.

The housekeeper was gently closing the door preparatory to following them, when she suddenly remembered Browning, who was standing at her side hesitating and irresolute.

"You had better come too," she remarked in a suppressed tone: "you can wait in one of the ante-rooms until we hear what Dr. Leslie's opinion is—it is just possible, you know, that we may want your help."

"Have *you* seen her?" he eagerly inquired.

"Not yet; but I will soon let you know how things are going on—meantime, don't on any account stir out of this room." Thus saying, she joined Willson and Dr. Leslie in her mistress's chamber.

"Very extraordinary," she heard the doctor murmur to himself as he bent over a table, and proceeded, with an air of grave and solemn importance, to pour a few drops of some ruby-coloured fluid into a wine-glass.

"Here, Mrs. Willson, give her this," he added, putting the vessel into her hand; "and while you are doing so I will speak to Mrs. Morby in another room."

"What is your opinion, doctor?" was the housekeeper's first concerned question, as soon as she found herself out of the precincts of the sick-room; "do you consider——"

"Bring me pen and paper," exclaimed the little doctor, cutting her short.

Mrs. Morby rather sullenly obeyed.

"Now, then, where is that fellow?" said the gentleman, in a quick, decided voice. "I mean the man who brought me here," he explained, with an impatient contraction of his smooth brow, on perceiving that Mrs. Morby, instead of answering him, merely stared at him with an expression of stupid amazement.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," she replied, recovering her usual composed manner; "I *thought* it probable you might want him, and therefore I fortunately took the precaution of——"

"All right," interrupted the doctor, hastily scrawling a few lines upon a sheet of paper; "let him come here at once, if you please. Now, my man"—this to Browning—"there is at present in London a very celebrated physician——"

"Just so, sir," said the quick-witted valet, instantly jumping at the right conclusion; "and you want to send him a message."

"Exactly," responded Dr. Leslie, nodding his head in token of approbation; "will you undertake to go with it to Dilton?"

"Certainly," was the prompt reply.

"Remember," continued the doctor, giving him the note, "it is of the utmost consequence that this telegram should be sent off immediately; if no time is lost, he will be able to come by the express train which leaves London——"

"You may depend on me, sir," exclaimed Browning, who was evidently anxious to set out.

"I don't doubt it, judging from the efficient manner in which you performed the charge committed to you by Mrs. Willson," replied the gentleman, with a little smile and shrug of the shoulders.

"Won't you tell me something about the poor lady?" asked Browning, coming back for a moment, and laying his hand entreatingly upon the doctor's arm; "is she likely to recover?"

"She seems marvellously well just now," said the latter, kindly, "and that is all I can say. Whether she will ever be restored to her former health greatly depends upon circumstances."

"Circumstances!" repeated Browning, as he mused on this equivocal answer; "*what* circumstances, I wonder?"

But being unable to solve the difficulty, he had to content himself with knowing that although the future was still hidden in obscurity, Mrs. Seymour's *present* condition was at least satisfactory.

Until the arrival of the London physician, Dr. Leslie never left his patient's bedside for a single moment. He quite won Willson's esteem by the extreme solicitude and concern he manifested, and the earnest and attentive interest with which he watched the invalid's progress towards perfect consciousness, and assisted nature's efforts to shake off the remains of the deadly stupor which had for so long a time held its mysterious and undisputed sway over her fragile frame.

Gradually the household awoke, and sounds of life and activity began once more to pervade the mansion.

Thanks to Mrs. Morby's "good management," none of the servants suspected what had occurred. She intended to choose her own time for making the disclosure, and until that time came, she maintained the keenest vigilance, and sharp, lynx-eyed observance of everything that transpired in the establishment, for the purpose of forcing the several members to perform their usual duties with more than their usual speed and quietness.

As soon as Browning returned from Dilton, he was despatched with a note to Sir George Hastings, requesting him to call at the Park without delay. This he did, and the housekeeper had an interview with him in the dining-room, in which she explained the necessity there was for him to countermand the orders he had issued respecting the funeral.

Right gladly did the worthy baronet undertake this pleasant though difficult office; and fervently he hoped that the recovery might indeed prove a permanent one.

At last the hour for the early express train to reach Dilton arrived. Mr. Seymour's carriage was waiting at the station; and the indefatigable Browning, who had volunteered to accompany the coachman, could scarcely restrain his impatience, as he watched for the first intimation of its approach.

Presently it came, and he walked restlessly up and down, gazing with intense eagerness, first into one carriage, and then into another, to see whether the gentleman they were in quest of had obeyed Dr. Leslie's summons. But he saw no one bearing the least resemblance to the person pictured in his imagination, and was turning away with a sickening feeling of disappointment, when a gentleman occupying a comfortable position in one of the compartments of a first-class carriage (much too calm and self-possessed to be come on such an errand, Browning thought) slowly rose from his seat, and after

deliberately folding up the newspaper he had been reading, and conveying it to the pocket of his coat, he quietly and cautiously stepped down upon the platform.

There he stood for a few seconds, composedly looking after the train, as it passed out of sight. He seemed so very unlike a man in haste; so cool and leisurely in all he did, so thoroughly and completely at home, that Browning hesitated to accost him.

However, it was no time for ceremony, so going up to him, the valet civilly inquired whether he was on his way to Mertonsville Park.

"Ah, yes," replied the stranger, turning round without the slightest movement of surprise; "you have a conveyance here, I presume?"

"Certainly, sir," returned Browning, overjoyed to find that his fears were not verified, though he was by no means pleased with the new-comer's apparent indifference. "This way, if you please, sir."

"There's no use in hurrying on in that fashion," exclaimed the celebrated physician, as he vainly tried to keep up with Browning's long strides; "I never yet knew a patient whose life was saved by such furious haste."

"But perhaps——" began Browning, rather indignantly; and then he stopped, as if conscious that he had no right to venture an opinion.

"Ah!" returned the doctor, laughing, "your look insinuates that you are inclined to suspect me of having *lost* some by my tardiness! Not a bad idea, upon my word!" he muttered, with a sort of good-natured chuckle, on getting into the carriage.

"I'm thankful it doesn't depend upon himself what time he reaches the Park," soliloquised Browning, clambering up to his old position beside the coachman.

"Who is he?" asked the latter, fully expecting to hear that it was one of Mr. Seymour's relations come for the purpose of attending the funeral. "I never remember seeing him before."

This question was too much for the social and excitable Browning. He had faithfully promised Mrs. Morby that he would not speak on the subject without her permission; and so far he had kept his word, although it cost him a great effort to do so. Now, however, his lips were unsealed, and he recounted to the awe-stricken coachman all that he himself knew regarding the wonderful change which had taken place in their mistress's condition.

* * * * * *

It almost seemed to Willson as if the deliberations of the two doctors would never come to an end, so indescribable was her anxiety to know the result.

Their final opinion, when announced, though couched in very guarded language, was such as to fill her heart with unutterable thanksgiving and joy.

In the midst of her own deep happiness, she was not unmindful of Mr. Seymour, in token of which she went to Dr. Leslie directly the consulting physician had left them, and earnestly besought him to lose no time in carrying the good news to the sorrowing husband.

But for some reason or other, the doctor was decidedly averse to encountering Mr. Seymour just then; and Willson soon found that if it was to be done at all, *she* must be the doer of it.

Accordingly, she left the sick room in charge of Mrs. Morby, and, having gone and given a gentle knock at the library door, waited with a fluttering heart for the permission to enter.

CHAPTER LXX.

CONQUERED AT LAST.

"Over all things brooding slept
The quiet sense of something lost." TENNYSON.

"Do not spurn me
In my prayer.
For this wandering, ever longer, evermore,
Hath overworn me;
And I know not on what shore
I may rest from my despair." E. B. BROWNING.

"Oft a speedier pain the guilty feels,
The hue and cry of heaven pursues him at his heels."
DRYDEN.

AND Mr. Seymour! what of him? How was he occupied all these hours? Did no sound penetrate into his retirement, and awaken his curiosity? Were the hurried footsteps passing and repassing his library, the muffled voices, and the opening and shutting of doors, quite unheeded. Ah, yes! he was deaf to all.

He had left his wife's chamber, after gazing at her as he supposed for the last time, with Willson's bitter cry resounding in his ears: "My gentle, broken-hearted mistress!" and try as he would, he could not shake off the impression these words had produced on him, or divest himself of a sense of the keenest and most depressing compunction and regret.

All his habitual pride and self-esteem seemed to have deserted him; and as he paced the room with hurried, uneven steps, his wild, haggard looks, and the deep lines of agony traced upon his once haughty countenance, plainly evidenced the distracted state of his agitated mind.

It was in vain that he struggled to forget the past. He did not succeed. And the fact of every remembrance being linked with some separate memento of his suffering wife, rendered his reminiscences all the more unendurable.

He thought of the loveless and cheerless life she had of late been leading—a mother deprived of her only child, and refused even the slight alleviation of hearing of his welfare.

Again, the expression of acute despair which he had so often and so calmly witnessed passing over her sweet face, haunted him like some gloomy vision of the night—her impotent, though desperate efforts to free herself from his tyranny, and assert her own independence of action—the unequal combat between strength and weakness—tears, entreaties, and passionate yearnings, *versus* a "waterproof," pitiless, and resolute will. He retraced it in imagination step, by step, until he almost loathed himself for the harsh measures he had taken.

Another bitter ingredient was added to his cup by the knowledge

acquired now for the first time, that he had unconsciously but surely alienated Mrs. Seymour's affection from himself. In confirmation of which numerous circumstances, apparently trivial in themselves, and which he had at the time, in his unbounded pride and egotism, never dreamt of analysing, rose vividly and with startling clearness before his enlightened vision in this period of self-abasement.

He recollected a thousand instances wherein she had appeared to shrink from him with palpable indifference, if not aversion, and when he reflected upon the air of formal reserve with which she treated him, her often averted looks, and the cold and guarded language she uniformly addressed to him, he wondered at his previous blindness and infatuation in not ascribing it to its true cause.

But this was only the beginning. Gradually he found the tide of thought so overwhelming and so distressing; the prickings of conscience so poignant and severe; the arrows of remorse attended by such excruciating torture, that he wiped his damp brow, and gazed helplessly around him, as if vainly seeking for some mode of escape.

"I must *do* something," he said at last, and his voice was very faint and quivering; "nothing but work will break this terrible spell."

As he uttered these words, his wandering eye lighted upon a note which Sir George Hastings had sent him in the morning, earnestly requesting that he would himself write an answer to an important communication he had just received from one of the gentlemen invited to attend the funeral.

Still, this was only a continuation of the same melancholy subject, and Mr. Seymour felt sorely tempted to decline undertaking so painful a duty. However, the urgency of the case, and the shortness of time that yet remained before the completion of the sad and solemn ceremonial, finally decided him.

"It will be too late, unless done at once," he murmured, with a heavy sigh; and, mechanically going to his desk, he unfastened it, dipped his pen in the ink, and prepared to write.

But, to his surprise and annoyance, there was not a single sheet of black-edged paper in his desk. Pushing it impatiently aside, therefore, he threw down his pen, and dragged himself to a distant writing-table, in a deep drawer of which he was accustomed to keep an assortment of paper, and other writing materials. Here he found what he sought; but, as it happened to be at the very bottom of the drawer, he was obliged to throw out nearly all its contents before he could lay hold of it.

Among the rest he observed the plan of the tower, which he had been looking over with Sir William Crossley at the moment of Mrs. Seymour's first attack of illness.

It had been hastily rolled up, and thrown with such carelessness into the drawer, that it was very much crushed and torn, and seemed almost useless.

In replacing it, Mr. Seymour, who was the soul of tidiness, unconsciously began to refold it, when a crumpled newspaper fell from within.

Straightway the thought occurred to his mind that this must be the very newspaper his wife had been reading, and which Dr. Leslie seemed so anxious to obtain!

He took it into his hands with a sort of awe (for was it not one of

the last things *she* had touched?) and putting it on the table, smoothed out its ruffled pages with his trembling fingers.

His face grew, if possible, a shade paler than before, as he perceived that out of one corner a small piece had been torn.

He remembered having seen the fragment in his wife's hand, when assisting to carry her to her own apartment.

By some mysterious instinct his eye roved over the letterpress.

What was it that suddenly made him start, and put his hand to his side with a gesture of the uttermost agony? what was it that wrung from him that low cry of deep, heart-rending despair, as he sank down upon a couch, and, covering his face with both his hands, writhed like one who suffers the intensest bodily torture?

The paragraph he read contained a simple account of the foundering of the *Burdwan*, a vessel bound for Africa; and summed up with those oft-repeated but sadly emphatic words, "All on board perished." After mentioning a few particulars, the paper went on to say,—

"Among the passengers who have thus met with an untimely end, we regret to see the name of a gentleman who was going out on the part of the 'Lanchester African Exploration Society,' in connection with the propagation of the Gospel. The qualifications requisite for such an important expedition were, we understand, possessed by this gentleman in an eminent degree. Actuated by a truly missionary spirit, his first grand object consisted in being the instrument of disseminating religious instruction; but in addition to this leading feature in his truly exalted character, his high literary attainments, the clearness and intelligence of his general views (to say nothing of his topographical sketches, as proved by a book recently published on this interesting subject by the afore-mentioned society, which will be sufficient to raise the name of *Mr. Herbert Seymour*. . . ."

This, then, was the climax. These the words which dropped like glowing metal upon his heart. Poor unhappy father! was it not enough to account for that terrible moaning cry which issued from his bloodless lips,—

"Desolate—desolate! bereft of all—*all!* O God! my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

* * * * * *

Thus the hours rolled away; for despair, like joy, takes no note of time; and everything else was forgotten—*everything* but his own inexpressible and all-absorbing misery.

And so it came to pass that Willson's gentle knock was unheard, or if heard, disregarded.

Fortunately, however, Mr. Seymour had, in anticipation of her requiring his assistance, purposely left the door unlocked; and when Willson discovered this, and also found that her plea for admission was unresponded to, she thought it better to enter without waiting for his consent.

Accordingly she stepped quietly into the room, and, going close up to him, tried to gain his notice by touching him on the arm.

His disordered dress, and pale, haggard looks, as he turned suddenly round on being thus disturbed, would have told her that he had watched the same live-long night, even if she had been previously ignorant of the fact.

"What are *you* doing here?" he demanded, and his voice sounded like some far-away echo; "do you wish to reproach me again?"

"*I* reproach you?" repeated the old woman, recoiling a step, and regarding him in wonder and dismay.

"Yes; did you not accuse me of breaking her heart?" he asked, hoarsely.

"No; not for the world would I say such a cruel thing," replied Willson, gazing tearfully at his bowed and bent figure, so unlike what she had ever seen it before; "God knows your suffering is intense enough without *that*."

"Nevertheless, it is the truth," returned Mr. Seymour, in a hollow voice; "it is I alone," he added, setting his quivering lips tightly together, "I alone who murdered her. But for my harshness, and injustice, and tyranny——"

"Stop, oh, stop!" exclaimed Willson, coming eagerly forward; "I want to tell you——"

"You need tell me nothing," gloomily interposed the anguished man; "I know it all! Look here—*this* is what killed her, and I—wretch that I am—*I* was the cause of it."

As he spoke, he pushed the newspaper into the old woman's hand, pointed significantly to the paragraph above referred to, and then resumed his former moody attitude.

"There is something I don't understand here!" thought Willson, as she fumbled in her pocket for her spectacles, and having found them, tremblingly tried to adjust them on her forehead. "I can hardly recognise him in this unusual frame of mind; he seems quite a changed character! What *can* it all mean?"

Her mild eyes fastened themselves upon the paper with an expression of the deepest anxiety; but it was some time before she could find out what it was he wished her to see. At last she caught Herbert's name, and this led her to study the page with additional earnestness.

"O God!" she gasped, tottering forward as the painful truth dawned upon her, "is there *no* perfect happiness in this world?"

"Perfect misery, rather," groaned the unhappy man.

"But it cannot be!" added Willson, in a tone of feverish excitement. "I will not believe it!" And she once more took the paper into her trembling hands, hoping, it may be, to discover that her first conclusion had been an erroneous one.

Ere long it dropped from her nerveless grasp, and with a half-smothered cry she fell fainting on the ground. Her reason had already been stretched to its full tension, and this sudden re-action from joy to sorrow was too much for her feeble frame to sustain.

Mr. Seymour, who appeared stunned and bewildered by such an unexpected occurrence, remained gazing at her for a while with an expression of extraordinary surprise and visible agitation of manner; but his energy seemed entirely to have abandoned him; for he made no effort to restore her to consciousness, and the poor creature might have lain there for an indefinite length of time had not his attention been at length arrested by a smart tap at the door.

He started up then, and locked it, without looking to see who claimed admission, and, going into a small dressing-room adjoining the library, he brought from thence some water, which he poured upon Willson's face.

The shock revived her, and when five minutes had elapsed she was able to sit up and think.

Her face was deadly pale, and the anxious lines about her mouth and the sad wistfulness of her sunken eyes showed that though she tried to dissemble her emotion, she could not wholly succeed.

"Well, we must think of the living now." These were her first words, uttered in the tone of one still struggling with some fierce disappointment, and yet resolved on concealing the fact from others. "We must think of the *living*, sir;" and she placed her hand upon Mr. Seymour's arm for the purpose of getting him to regard her with more attentiveness.

"The living!" he dreamily repeated, "who are they?"

Without appearing to hear this question, Willson continued,—

"Did you ever hear of any one coming to life again, sir, after being to all appearance dead?"

Mr. Seymour stared at her in manifest perplexity.

"My good Willson," he said soothingly, "go and rest yourself; you are trembling all over."

"But won't you answer me first, sir?" she replied with increased earnestness.

"She little knows how irksome her presence is to me," thought Mr. Seymour. "Poor creature! these trials have, I fear, unhinged her mind;" and, rising from his seat, he tried to escape from her by walking to the other end of the room.

She followed him with a repetition of her former question.

An impatient exclamation came to Mr. Seymour's lips; but he checked it as he remembered the kindness and devotion she had always shown to his wife, and in a gentle tone he inquired,—

"What is it you want me to tell you?"

A bright crimson flush appeared on her faded cheeks, as she again asked,—

"Did you ever hear of any one being restored to life after being considered dead?"

"Yes; such things *have* happened, I believe; but——"

"Well, sir, listen to me for a moment. Supposing your dear lady had after all not been dead, but merely in a sort of trance——"

"Willson, why will you torture me?" exclaimed Mr. Seymour, with a gesture of pain.

"And supposing," pursued the old woman, paying no heed to this interruption, "it should please the Lord to restore her to you——"

"For God's sake forbear, or you will drive me as mad as yourself!" cried the unhappy man, with a face of ashy paleness. "Because of your kindness to *her*, Willson," he went on, forcing himself to proceed in a gentler tone, "I will promise to do everything in my power to render you happy and comfortable; but *don't*——"

"It 's little that I shall want in this world," tremulously answered the old woman; "but if you will try to forget your own sorrows for a minute or two, and listen carefully to what I am about to tell you, you will be conferring on me the greatest boon I can crave!"

"Say on, then," replied Mr. Seymour, heaving a sigh of unutterable anguish; "I will do my best to follow you."

Willson needed no second bidding; but, commencing from the moment when he had left her alone with the dead, she recapitulated everything that had since occurred.

While she was speaking, Mr. Seymour's chest heaved convulsively; the blue veins stood out clear and distinct upon his pallid

brow, and his breath came in quick, short gasps. Not one syllable did he utter until she had finished; and then, going swiftly up to her, he took her by the shoulder, and, drawing her to one of the windows, pulled up the blind, and fixed his eyes keenly and searchingly upon her worn face.

Apparently satisfied with his investigation, he turned away and—oh! strange, unwonted sight!—he wept aloud!

I believe these tears were the first he had shed since his childhood.

* * * * * *

"How shall I ever be able to repay you, Willson!" he said, in a husky voice, approaching her when his emotion had somewhat decreased, and taking her hand with a gesture of the utmost respect.

"Thank Him!" she replied, pointing upward.

"Oh, I do thank Him most fervently for affording me an opportunity of redeeming the past," returned Mr. Seymour, in a voice of solemn earnestness. "But *that*, alas, I can never do," he added, a shade of the deepest melancholy overspreading his countenance. "*He* is gone for ever, and *she*—oh, I fear she will never cease to hate me, Willson."

"There's no use in anticipating evils," said the good woman, wiping her own eyes; "they come soon enough without that; besides——"

"Besides what, my friend?"

"Well, I was going to say, that from something I heard the doctors say, I think there is a chance of my mistress having forgotten what led to her illness."

"But even then it will be nearly as bad," observed Mr. Seymour, with a troubled and uneasy look; "she will naturally consider that it is *I* who am still preventing him from coming——"

Before he could add more, another knock came to the door; and Willson, thinking there might be news of her mistress, hastened to open it. She found Mrs. Morby standing outside.

"The doctor wishes you to return to Mrs. Seymour immediately," said that individual, in her usual calm and dulcet tones. "We have procured some kind of concentrated nourishment, which he thinks will be of much service to her if she can be induced to take it; but she refuses to receive it from me, and seems, by the inquiring glances she keeps throwing round the room, to be asking for you."

"May I accompany you—just to take one look at her?" pleaded Mr. Seymour, as Willson was about to leave him.

"Well," was her slow and hesitating answer, "if you will keep out of sight, and promise not to utter a word, there can be no risk in your doing so."

Eagerly he gave the required assurance, on the strength of which the old woman undertook the responsibility of admitting him into his wife's chamber, without consulting Dr. Leslie on the subject.

Mr. Seymour kept his word. Without being himself perceived, he saw enough to relieve him from the weight of suffering which had been occasioned by his wife's supposed death; and though he still felt, and ever would feel, the most poignant anguish when he reflected upon Herbert's untimely end, he could not but rejoice in knowing that there was now, at least, a prospect of *her* being once more restored to him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE OLD GALLERY, AND ITS HISTORY.

"The hand of the reaper
Takes the ears that are hoary,
But the voice of the weeper
Wails manhood in glory:
The autumn winds rushing
Waft the leaves that are serest,
But our flower was in flushing
When blighting was nearest."

WALTER SCOTT.

GREAT was the excitement that prevailed among the servants of the establishment, when Mrs. Morby formally announced them the satisfactory change which had been effected in Mrs. Seymour's condition.

Wonder, doubt, incredulity, amazement, and awe, were all in their turn expressed; and in consideration of the important part Mrs. Willson had played on the occasion, she was unanimously voted a perfect, heroine! Browning also came in for his meed of applause; though, to use his own words, he only did what Willson told him.

"And that was the best thing you *could* do," remarked the cook, with an approving smile.

"What a fortunate thing it was," said Browning, confidentially addressing himself to the impressible Juliet, who was actually shedding tears of joy, "that she insisted on sitting up every night!"

Juliet silently assented.

"And it is still more fortunate," continued the valet, "that she set her face so determinately against having the poor lady put into the coffin until the day before the funeral."

"That's what I can't understand," exclaimed Ursula, who had caught these last words. "Mrs. Morby," turning to the housekeeper, "is it really true that she was the cause of the delay?"

"What delay?" she demanded, by no means pleased at Browning's want of politeness, in carrying on the conversation in a tone too low for her to hear.

Ursula explained.

"Yes, indeed she *did* object," observed Mrs. Morby, appearing for the first time struck with the idea; "not that she had the smallest hope or expectation of *this* happening; but it seems she has always felt an unaccountable repugnance to look upon any one, however dear they may be to her, after they are once placed in their coffin. I am told she acted in the same way when her former mistress (Mrs Seymour's mother) died."

"In the present case, 'twas a most providential thing," observed the old butler, passing his hand hastily across his eyes.

"You may well say that," rejoined Ursula, in a tone of unfeigned earnestness; "in my opinion, it has been the saving of the poor lady's life—the very sight of the coffin would have been enough to kill her."

"Yes," exclaimed Juliet, shuddering, and breaking forth into fresh tears; "only fancy——"

Mrs. Morby gazed at her with supreme contempt, observing, in those quiet though cutting tones she generally employed when in any way displeased, "I really think you might reserve your tears for some more suitable occasion, Juliet; this is a time for rejoicing, not mourning."

"I am *not* mourning, Madame Morby," indignantly replied the lady's-maid, dashing away her tears, and regarding her with an angry, excited look; "it's because I'm so glad that I cry."

"I have no doubt of it," rejoined the housekeeper, scarcely able to conceal the irritation she felt on perceiving, from the countenances of those around her, that they all sympathised more or less with Juliet; "indeed, upon second thoughts, I can hardly wonder at *your* being somewhat excited at the turn things have taken—it is quite natural under the circumstances."

Juliet stared at her in astonishment, totally ignorant of her meaning.

"I was forgetting the consequences *to yourself*," added Mrs. Morby, meaningly.

"To myself!" echoed the lady's-maid, "I do not yet understand."

"Of course this will make a considerable difference in your prospects," continued her adversary, with patronising blandness; "for if Mrs. Seymour recovers, you will no doubt retain your situation, whereas you would otherwise have been under the necessity of looking out for another; and you know from experience how difficult it is to meet with one where the advantages are similar to what you have been in the habit of enjoying."

"So these are my motives!" cried Juliet, her dark cheeks flushing angrily. "I could not have believed you would accuse me of such meanness and insincerity." And, according to her general custom when excited, she poured forth a torrent of indignant protests, such as might have had the effect of seriously annoying Mrs. Morby, had she known sufficient French to understand her. As it was, she merely smiled provokingly, and said nothing; seeing which, Juliet became more and more warm in defending herself from her unjust insinuations.

"Don't take any notice of her, Juliet," said Browning, in a low tone, intended only for her ear: "she judges others by herself."

Burns, whose eyes had been for the last few minutes steadily fixed upon the housekeeper's face, turned round with a half smile as he caught these words.

"When will you learn prudence, lad?" he asked in a kindly tone, touching the young man familiarly on the shoulder.

"I hope I shall *never* learn that kind of prudence which teaches one to appear different from what they really are," rejoined Browning, his nostrils quivering disdainfully.

Again the same half smile curved the old man's lip as he replied,—

"There's not much fear of that, I imagine."

"Permit me to suggest," observed Mrs. Morby's calm voice, addressing them *en masse*, "that, as there are a great many duties to be attended to, we had better not waste any more time in talking. Mr. Seymour desired me to say," turning to the cook, "that he intends dining downstairs this evening with Sir George Hastings."

"I'm thankful to hear it," warmly responded Ursula, marching off to her own peculiar territory, accompanied by Mons. Chantilly, the French *chef*.

"As for you, Browning," continued Mrs. Morby, after she had given a few orders to some of the other servants, "perhaps, with the assistance of the under butler and three of the footmen, you might be able to remove a certain unsightly article from Mrs. Seymour's dressing-room."

"I know what you mean," was the ready answer.

"You must, of course, enter by the outer door, which you will find open; and I need scarcely charge you to see that everything is done in the quietest manner. If you wait a moment," added Mrs. Morby, as Browning was going to obey her, I will myself accompany you."

"Where are we to carry it?" asked the young man, pausing at the foot of the stairs.

"Ah, *where?*" mused Mrs. Morby, looking undecided.

"There's that old gallery," suggested Browning, as he suddenly remembered the way Willson had taken him to the stables.

"A very good idea," returned the housekeeper; "it will be completely out of sight there. But the distance?" she urged presently.

"Never mind that," returned Browning, cheerfully; "we can easily manage it, if you say the word."

"Well, try then," she answered, motioning him to proceed.

It was no easy task; nevertheless it was at last accomplished, and the old butler, who had instinctively followed them, heaved a sigh of relief when he saw the tenantless coffin safely stowed away in the farthest corner of the deserted gallery.

But for its bright scarlet covering, and pearl-rimmed silver plate, it would have seemed by no means an incongruous adjunct to that grim old place, with its low arched roof, its small windows of stained glass, admitting only a dim and dusky light even in the brightest weather; and the quaint panelled walls which bore the faded portraits of many a swart-visaged warrior and stately dame, whose very names had been long since forgotten.

"What a queer, ghost-like place it is," said one of the footmen, surveying it with an irrepressible shudder, "I *never* liked to come near it, but *now*——" glancing at the coffin.

An expressive shrug filled up the sentence.

A scornful smile curled Mrs. Morby's lip.

"You ought to have been a woman," she said, eyeing him in cool contempt.

"A *timorous* woman, you mean," quietly interposed Burns.

"Very true," she replied, taking it for granted that he wished to pay *her* a compliment: "*I* have certainly no such absurd fears and fancies."

The pampered footman drew himself sulkily up, and was muttering something about being not understood, etc., when Browning, who had been reconnoitring the ground, suddenly joined them, with the abrupt exclamation—,

"Did none of you know of this private entrance to the stables?"

"I heard that there *was* one," answered Mrs. Morby, advancing with some curiosity to the chasm which appeared directly he touched the proper spring; "but I did not feel sufficient interest in it to investigate the matter."

"It was a clever idea of Willson's, taking you this way," observed the old butler, contemplatively.

"Yes, it no doubt saved time," admitted Mrs. Morby, rather reluctantly.

"A great deal, besides the unavoidable delay of rousing either the coachman or one of the grooms; for he could not otherwise have got in, in consequence of the doors being always locked on the inside."

"What puzzles me," said Browning, "is this, How is it possible that by going this short passage one can get to a place which we all know is half a mile from the house?"

"Not quite half a mile," corrected the veracious Burns.

"Very near it then," retorted the valet.

"I don't see the smallest difficulty in accounting for it," said Mrs. Morby, going to one of the windows, which she vainly tried to open. "This part of the building consists of an altogether distinct wing to that occupied by the family.

"Yes, of course," assented Browning; "still, when you are walking outside the house (in this direction, I mean), you see no sign of its being in any way connected with the stables."

"Nor is it, properly speaking; but has it never occurred to you that if, instead of having to go round by the usual road, you could manage to step across the beautiful glen which separates us from the other side of the park, the distance would be much sooner accomplished?"

"Oh, that's it, is it!" exclaimed Browning, with the air of one who has made a discovery; "then I suppose the old ivy-covered archway which looks like a ruin from outside, is in reality a bridge thrown over the glen."

"Precisely," answered Burns; "it was built by one of Mr. Seymour's ancestors, who prided himself on keeping a magnificent stud of horses, and wished to have the power of obtaining access to the stables at all hours, in order that he might judge whether his instructions as to their mode of treatment were strictly followed by those who had the charge of them. I have heard that the existence of this private passage was unknown to any one except himself. His constant visits, therefore (generally paid at night, after all the servants had retired to rest), were unsuspected, and the astonished grooms, finding that in some mysterious way their master became acquainted with everything they did, began to hint that his extraordinary knowledge could only be acquired by supernatural means."

"It was very unfair of him to take advantage of them in that way," said the footman, whose sympathies were entirely with the defunct grooms.

"The present Mr. Seymour would certainly never stoop to such artifice," mused Browning, as he gently replaced the panel in its old position, and followed the others out of the gallery, the door of which Mrs. Morby, at Burns' suggestion, locked, and carried off the key with her.

By this time the house wore an altogether different appearance. The glorious sunshine streamed in at the previously darkened windows, and cheerfulness and comfort began once more to reassert their sway over the habitation which had so lately been environed by the gloomy shadow of death.

On repairing to Mrs. Seymour's apartment, Mrs. Morby found that

she was still progressing favourably. An experienced nurse, whom Dr. Leslie had, at Mr. Seymour's particular request, procured for them, was already in attendance, and poor Willson had at length been induced to retire into an adjoining room, for the purpose of obtaining the rest she so much needed.

Later in the day Mr. Seymour summoned all the servants into the dining-room, and after addressing them for a few minutes on the subject which was just then occupying all their thoughts, he proceeded to give them some instructions regarding their future conduct.

He spoke of the precariousness of his wife's condition, and told them how important it was that she should be kept free from the slightest excitement or annoyance, dwelling more especially upon the almost certain consequences which would follow, were she ever reminded of what had occurred.

"I hope, therefore," said Mr. Seymour, in conclusion, "you will see the necessity of binding yourselves by a solemn promise never to reveal to your mistress the melancholy history of the last few days."

"Here, Morby," addressing the housekeeper, "take this," putting a sheet of paper into her hands. "Read over to them the simple form of promise I have written at the top; let those who approve of it sign the paper, and if any amongst them refuse to do so, see that they leave the Park this very evening."

Mrs. Morby did as he requested. I need hardly say that they all, without a single exception, gave the required promise.

Their motives were of course various, but the result in every case was the same.

Browning was the only one who made even the shadow of resistance. He fancied it showed a want of confidence in him, and said that his bare word ought to be enough.

"Nonsense, my lad," said the old butler, who caught the faint glitter of Mrs. Morby's cold eye, and knew she would represent the matter in the most unfavourable light to Mr. Seymour; "you forget——"and he whispered a sentence in Browning's ear, which made him cheerfully take up the pen, and write his name with the others.

"Very good," remarked Mr. Seymour, when he had glanced over the list, and been assured by Mrs. Morby that there was not one name absent. "Now I shall be obliged by your distributing these," and he pushed a large bag of sovereigns towards her; "they will serve to remind you all of the unexpected happiness——"

He paused. A painful spasm shot through his frame, a cold dew broke out on his forehead, and sinking down in a chair, he clenched his hands, as if he would fain drive back the torturing shock of recollection which could not and would not be repressed.

Every eye was fixed upon his livid countenance, with an expression of wonder and alarm. Their anxiety to find out what had just agitated him was intense; and they waited with such breathless eagerness for his next words, that nothing could for some seconds be heard save the ticking of a little French clock over the mantelshelf.

Then Sir George Hastings came forward—he had been standing in the deep embrasure of one of the windows, a silent but interested spectator of the scene—and, laying his hand upon his friend's shoulder, exclaimed, in a voice which trembled with emotion,—

"Let them go, Seymour; you have said all that is necessary."

"Not all," huskily responded Mr. Seymour, making an effort to wipe the moisture from his forehead: I must speak of *him*."

"Not now, not to-day," anxiously replied Sir George, knowing full well to whom he alluded.

"Yes, they *will* hear of it," returned Mr. Seymour, speaking in a low tone of feverish impatience, "and I may as well tell them myself. I want to warn them against letting their mistress——"

"You must not—shall not do this," said Sir George, with energy; "you are exhausted already. Go into the other room, my friend, and leave me to manage this."

"So be it, then," wearily answered the other, rising mechanically from his seat, and walking out of the apartment with drooping head and eyes sorrowfully bent upon the ground.

When the door had closed on him, Sir George proceeded, though not without considerable embarrassment, to execute his self-imposed task. He had scarcely thought of the effect which the announcement of Herbert's death was calculated to produce on the minds of some of his auditors, or he would have seen fresh reason to congratulate himself on having prevented Mr. Seymour from making the disclosure *in propria persona*.

Even Mrs. Morby's unmoved and impassable features underwent a sudden change, and her small eyes expanded with an expression of wonder and awe-stricken amazement, while the sad earnest looks and tearful faces of many of those around her spoke of affection, sorrow, and regret.

Browning's first startled cry of consternation and dismay was quickly echoed by Ursula, with whom Herbert had been an especial favourite, and *their* demonstrative grief was equalled, if not surpassed, in intensity by that experienced by the grey-haired butler, whose pale, rigid face, and low, stifled sob of anguish, as he seized one of the projecting branches of the massive sideboard to prevent himself from falling, told how heavily the stroke had descended upon his faithful and affectionate heart.

CHAPTER LXXII.

ANXIETIES.

"And thou must sail upon this sea a long
Eventful voyage. The wise *may* suffer wreck,
The foolish *must*." WARE.

"Our pains are real things, and all
Our pleasures but fantastical,
Diseases of their own accord;
But cares come difficult and hard." BUTLER.

IN proportion as Mrs. Seymour's strength returned, so did the anxiety of her friends increase to discover whether she retained any recollection of the painful circumstance which had been the primary cause of her illness.

But though they continued to scrutinise her every word, look, and action, with the deepest attention, they found it impossible to decide the question.

She made no allusion to the past; and when Dr. Leslie cautiously ventured on one or two occasions to introduce the subject, she said nothing which could lead him to suppose that she was in the least degree interested in his remarks.

A fortnight wore away before it was considered safe for her to have an interview with Mr. Seymour; and during the whole of that time she did not once inquire for him, or express any surprise at his non-appearance.

One afternoon, however,—it was the first day she had been permitted to go beyond her own apartments,—she was reclining on a couch in an adjoining sitting-room, with Willson as her only attendant, when, turning suddenly towards her, she asked abruptly,—

"Where is my husband?"

"He's downstairs, I believe," replied the old woman, starting visibly.

"I should like to see him," observed the invalid, and her voice was perfectly calm and composed.

"Would you?" questioned Willson, stealing an anxious half-frightened glance at her.

"Perhaps, if you ring for Juliet," continued her mistress, "she will tell him what I say."

"Are you sure you are strong enough?" said Willson, with an agitation of manner which she tried to conceal.

"Strong enough," repeated Mrs. Seymour, and she gave a pleasant little laugh; "there's no great exertion——"

"Well, perhaps not," responded Willson, somewhat relieved; "I will go and see about it."

As she quietly closed the door after her, she murmured to herself, "Sooner or later it must, of course, be done; I only wish we could put it off until the doctor comes."

Almost before the wish was uttered she heard Dr. Leslie's step approaching the ante-room; and, having detained him there for a moment, she breathlessly communicated to him Mrs. Seymour's desire.

"It is certainly a risk," he said, gravely shaking his head, "a great risk. Nevertheless she must be obeyed. I think," he added, after an instant's consideration, "it will be well for you to return to your mistress at once. *I* will fetch Mr. Seymour, and, while the interview lasts, remain here, so as to be at hand in case of any distressing emergency. Meantime, be sure and keep your eye upon Mrs. Seymour's face, and if the sight of her husband, or anything he may happen to say, appears to have the effect of discomposing or annoying her, see that he instantly leaves her."

Willson nodded assent, and, re-entering the sitting-room, took up her former station opposite Mrs. Seymour's sofa.

"Is he coming?" inquired the lady, regarding her with a smile.

"I expect so," she answered, trying to speak lightly, though she really felt excessively uneasy; "I have sent him a message."

"Ah! then he will soon be here," was the satisfied response; and neither of them spoke again until Mr. Seymour made his appearance.

He looked ten years older than when Mrs. Seymour had last seen him. His face had a worn and weary expression; deep lines of care were traced on his brow, his dark hair was sprinkled with silver, and his figure, once so tall, erect, and commanding, now seemed painfully bent and drooping.

A strangely altered man he appeared, as he came up to his wife's sofa, and fixed his eyes with wistful earnestness upon her, as if expecting, and yet dreading to hear her speak.

He stood like one who knows what is coming, and is determined to bear it without flinching; like one who sees the approach of the storm, and feels that, be the consequences what they may, he must brave it.

"Yes," this was the language of his face, "I deserve reproach; and though my heart may break in the struggle, I will not shrink from it."

"You asked to see me," he said at length, and his voice was very low and tender.

"Yes," answered the lady, raising herself; "it seems a long time since——"

Mr. Seymour's eyes filled with tears at this reception, so different from what he had anticipated.

"My darling!" he said, bending over her before she could finish her sentence, and kissing her pale cheeks again and again; "you do not know how often I have wanted to come, how I have longed to speak to you. I have *seen* you," he added, "several times when you were sleeping; but Dr. Leslie was afraid that talking would excite you."

"A very unnecessary fear," she said, with her old placid smile; "I am nearly well now."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated her husband, taking one of her thin hands, and stroking it with a fond caressing movement.

And greatly to Willson's surprise, instead of shrinking from him, she remained quite passive; even allowing him to throw his arm around her, for the purpose of lifting her head from the cushions, and placing it upon his own shoulder.

"I have been thinking of Herbert, too," observed Mrs. Seymour, after a brief interval of silence.

Mr. Seymour gave a sort of gasp. Every particle of colour fled from his face, and he bit his lips to prevent himself from making an exclamation of dismay.

It was terrible for him to be reminded of his son just then! He had that same morning received answers to some letters of searching inquiry which he had written respecting the loss of the *Burdwan*; but these answers, alas! were so sadly significant, so ominously confirmative of all he had previously heard and feared, that his old feelings revived with painful intensity; the unclosed wound was torn rudely open, and his poor bleeding heart refused to be comforted.

"Yes," pursued Mrs. Seymour, happily unconscious of the storm which was agitating her husband, "I cannot imagine how it is that Herbert does not come near me. Where is he, my dear?"

More torture still! Had Mr. Seymour's life been the forfeit, he could not have uttered a word. His white face grew fixed and rigid, under the effort he made to restrain his emotion, and the arm with which he had been supporting his wife fell over the side of the sofa, stiff and motionless, just as if paralyzed.

Willson gazed at her mistress in mingled doubt and apprehension. The very nature of the question encouraged her to hope that she had, at least for the time, ceased to remember what had occurred; but the fear lest the unwelcome truth should again force itself upon the poor lady's mind, made her exceedingly anxious to change the current of her thoughts.

Seeing that Mr. Seymour was unable to speak, she came hurriedly forward, and tried to call the invalid's attention to something else; but without paying the slightest heed to her words, Mrs. Seymour went on in a quick, abrupt voice,—

"Oh, I remember it all now! How stupid of me to forget!"

"Ah! it's coming at last!" thought Mr. Seymour, pressing his lips more tightly together, whilst Willson almost groaned with disappointment.

"Yes, I remember," repeated the lady, gently and musingly; "of course he is not yet aware that I have been ill."

"Do you feel cold, ma'am?" insinuated Willson, taking up a heavy shawl from one of the chairs.

But Mrs. Seymour was too much interested in her subject to regard her.

"It will be quite a treat to see him again," she proceeded with animation; "don't you think so, my dear?"

Still Mr. Seymour made no answer, though he cast a hopeless and strangely bewildered look at Willson, whose surprise and perplexity increased every moment.

The lady's next words embarrassed them yet more:

"What day do you expect him home?"

"What day?" huskily faltered Mr. Seymour.

"Soon, I suppose," said his wife, apparently answering her own question; "this is September, is it not?"

Mr. Seymour assented; and she continued, speaking as much to herself as him,—

"I believe the end of August was the time fixed for their return; but when one is travelling it is not always easy to keep to the first

arrangement. If you will bring me the little blue desk that stands on my dressing-room table, Willson, I will see what Herbert says about it in his last letter."

Until the request was repeated Willson stood irresolute.

But for the perfect clearness and intelligence with which her mistress conversed on every other subject, she might have suspected the soundness of her mind. As it was, she scarcely knew what to think; and when at length she reluctantly left the room, in order to get the desk, she could not help imparting her fears to Dr. Leslie, and asking his advice.

With Mr. Seymour it was different. This unlooked-for allusion to Herbert's return had carried his thoughts back to that memorable evening, years ago, when they had welcomed him to his home with such acclamations of joy, little dreaming, as they so fondly gazed into his handsome and intelligent countenance, lighted up with an expression of intense and affectionate pleasure, of the momentous change which a few short months had effected in his whole character; and as the unhappy father contrasted the past with the present, and then ventured to direct one shuddering glance at the unknown future, a cold chill ran through his frame, and his heart seemed for the moment turned to stone.

But presently he roused himself, and took a rapid survey of his position.

It was evident, he thought, from Mrs. Seymour's loving reception of himself, and also from the way in which she had introduced Herbert's name, that the most painful part of her life was forgotten—if not altogether, yet for the present—and he felt that in the event of his expectations being in this respect fulfilled, he could not be too thankful.

Still, though he would thus be spared her reproaches, besides having the satisfaction of knowing that *she* had ceased to suffer, the remembrance of the many difficulties to be encountered in trying to keep her in blissful ignorance of her son's death was enough to fill him with doubt and dismay. The very date of the letters she was about to read, might undeceive her in an instant; or if that happily escaped her, there was a thousand other ways by which her eyes might be opened to the melancholy truth—a thousand reminiscences which might at any moment revisit her enfeebled mind, and have the effect of rendering her more hopelessly miserable than she had yet been.

As he was musing thus, the door unclosed, and Willson and Dr. Leslie came in together.

"Ah, you have brought my desk," said Mrs. Seymour, addressing the former with a smile.

"Yes; and the doctor," observed her husband, making an effort to keep up the conversation.

"So I see," replied Mrs. Seymour, holding out her hands for the desk.

"I am glad to find you here," said Dr. Leslie, coming forward.

"Thank you," returned Mrs. Seymour, absently.

"Will you allow me to feel your pulse?" continued the precise little man, eyeing her somewhat anxiously.

"Presently, doctor," she replied in a tone of good-humoured impatience. "Just now I am all eagerness to read my son's last

letter, as we are neither of us quite certain what day he has fixed for returning home. I hope," she added with a smile, "you can wait long enough for that."

"Oh, certainly," was the reply, accompanied by a respectful inclination of the head.

"Ah, here they are!" taking out a bundle of letters. "Now I wonder which is the one we want. Perhaps, my dear," putting them into her husband's hand, "*you* will be able to find it quicker than myself."

"Yes," interposed the doctor quickly, and with a meaning glance at Mr. Seymour, "I was about to remind you that I have strictly prohibited you from using your brain for some months to come."

"But there is no exertion in reading a letter," remonstrated the lady.

"Even that had much better be avoided," was the decisive reply.

"Is he not a thorough despot?" asked Mrs. Seymour, laughingly turning to her husband.

"Quite so," he replied, nervously beginning to open the packet.

Up to this time she had not noticed anything peculiar in his manner. Now, however, she fancied his voice sounded forced and unnatural; and, as she regarded him more attentively and with awakened interest, she was suddenly struck by the change which had taken place in his appearance.

"You are not ill!" she hastily demanded.

"Ill? oh, no!" he answered, with a faint and sickly smile.

"Mr. Seymour has, of course, suffered a great deal of uneasiness on your account," explained Dr. Leslie, seeing that she still looked unsatisfied; "but as he has no longer any cause for anxiety, he will soon be restored to his former health and spirits."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Seymour, with another wistful glance at him.

"Is this the letter you wished to read?" inquired her husband, clearing his throat, and moving his chair back from the light; "it is dated the first of August."

"Yes; that must be it," replied the lady; "just look over it, my dear, and tell me what he says about coming home."

"He speaks of the fifteenth of September," remarked Mr. Seymour, after a pause, during which his features worked convulsively, and his lip shook and quivered with suppressed emotion.

"Ah! I thought so," exclaimed the lady, starting up on her sofa; "you see, we may expect him very soon."

Poor Mr. Seymour! Here was a new obstacle staring him in the face. Whichever way he turned, he seemed to meet with nothing but defeat and disappointment. What possible excuse could he give for Herbert's non-appearance at the stipulated time? how, as weeks and months rolled away, was his long-continued absence to be accounted for, except by running the risk of sending her to her grave by confessing the true state of the case?

Before his parched lips could utter a sound, Dr. Leslie had come to his relief, by saying in a tone of playful warning,—

"Don't count too much on your son's punctuality, my dear madam."

"Why should I not?" asked his patient, rather indignantly.

"Every one seems, at present, to be possessed with such a mania for travelling," continued the little man, reflectively rubbing his forehead,

"that it would not occasion me the slightest surprise if Mr. Herbert were to postpone his return for at least a few months."

"I believe you will be mistaken," responded Mrs. Seymour, unbelievingly shaking her head.

"Well, I hope so, for your sake," replied the doctor, with unfeigned sincerity; "but I know how difficult it is for a party of gentlemen travelling together to abide by any fixed rule; they like to move just where and when the whim takes them, and——"

"True, they *might* wish to extend their tour," mused the lady; "I never thought of that. But at all events," she continued more briskly, "he would be sure to inform us, if they made any alterations in their plans."

"Yes; *provided* he had sufficient time," was the vague and somewhat unsatisfactory rejoinder.

The lady remained for a few minutes quite silent, apparently ruminating upon what she had heard; and, at a sign from Mr. Seymour, Willson, taking advantage of her abstraction, quietly replaced the letters in the desk, and carried it off to its old place in her mistress's dressing-room.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

VISIONS OF THE PAST.

"How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed.
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

CHARLES LAMB.

". . . At times, impetuous with emotion,
And anguish long-suppressed,
The swelling heart heaves, moaning like the ocean
That cannot be at rest."

LONGFELLOW.

"I SHALL not be able to stand this much longer, Leslie; these incessant allusions to the same painful subject are almost more than I can endure."

"I am sure it must be very distressing, sir."

"Distressing? why it is killing me by inches."

And Mr. Seymour's pale, haggard countenance and grief-laden eyes bore testimony to the truth of his assertion.

They were sitting alone together, he and the doctor, whom he had of late (in consideration of the zealous interest and continuous and unwearied assiduity he had displayed during his long attendance on his afflicted wife) admitted into his full confidence.

"It is bad enough for me to be obliged to keep such a constant watch over myself," continued Mr. Seymour, rising suddenly from his seat, and beginning to pace up and down the room. "No one knows what it costs me to force back my own feelings, and maintain a calm and indifferent manner when answering her reiterated questions regarding my poor son. But this I would willingly endure, were it not for the state of perpetual uncertainty and apprehensive perplexity in which I am kept, never knowing what the next moment may bring forth; always dreading and expecting to hear that she has been in some way or other made acquainted with the truth. I scarcely dare to leave her side for an instant, lest any ill-judging friend should gain access to her, and unwittingly divulge all that we are so anxious to conceal from her knowledge."

"You are, indeed, placed in an exceedingly difficult and trying position," returned Dr. Leslie, with a sympathetic shake of the head, "I can hardly tell how to advise——"

"Unfortunately also," pursued Mr. Seymour, "she has been expressing a wish to see the friends who have been in the habit of visiting her."

"Ah! that must be avoided," said the doctor, quickly, and with emphasis.

"But how can I prevent it, Leslie? She has never been accustomed to pass her time alone, and occasionally feels dull and listless."

"Something must be done," said the doctor, in a half-musing tone, as he fixed his eyes upon the ground with a rather puzzled expression.

"You are right there," gloomily answered his companion. "It is utterly impossible for things to remain as they are."

"Perhaps change of scene might serve to divert her," suggested Dr. Leslie, after a little reflection.

"Do you consider her strong enough to travel?" asked Mr. Seymour, in a less despondent tone. "When I proposed it last week, I thought you seemed doubtful."

"You were then speaking of the German spas. But why should you not first try a fashionable *English* watering-place? Supposing, for instance, you were to take her to Brighton for a few months?"

"She would meet two many of her old acquaintances there," objected Mr. Seymour.

"The Isle of Wight, then?"

Mr. Seymour still looked doubtful.

"Clifton—Cheltenham—Leamington?"

"Yes, that may do, said Mr. Seymour, stopping him at the last-mentioned place. "She has often spoken of spending a season at Leamington, so that there will, I trust, be no difficulty in persuading her to undertake the journey."

"The first move will, of course, be an experiment; but I have no doubt that if her health admits of it, she will greatly enjoy the variety of travelling. Perhaps by the time the winter is over, she may be able to accompany you to the Continent."

"When do you think we should set out for Leamington?"

"The sooner the better," was Dr. Leslie's concise rejoinder.

"Very good," said Mr. Seymour, in evident relief; "I will lose no time in writing to secure a suitable house. In the meantime, Leslie, if you are going upstairs"—the doctor had risen to leave the room—"I should be glad if you would kindly broach the subject with Mrs. Seymour, and let me know what she says."

"I shall have much pleasure in doing so," replied the gratified practitioner, respectfully bowing himself out of the apartment.

Mrs. Seymour received him with a pleased smile. Even *his* visits were a change to her, and served to break the monotony of which she was beginning to complain.

"Well, doctor," she said, accosting him in rather a doleful voice, as he came up to her, and inquired about her health, "I am sorry to say your prophecy seems likely to be fulfilled; the fifteenth is past, and still Herbert has not arrived."

"I regret it on your account, my dear madam," he replied cheerfully; "but I think you can scarcely find it in your heart to blame him—this lovely weather is very enticing to travellers."

"Yes," spoken somewhat hesitatingly; "only I wish I could understand it."

Dr. Leslie regarded her for a few seconds with latent uneasiness.

"I hope you are not permitting your mind to be agitated by any nervous fears?" he said gravely.

"Oh, no; but, doctor," lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper, and casting a rapid glance around her, to make sure that only himself and her constant attendant Willson were there, "such a strange fancy keeps flitting across my brain."

"Indeed," returned the gentleman, in a tone of well-assumed composure. "I am by no means surprised to hear it, my dear madam; it is, I assure you, quite a common symptom in cases like yours."

"Is it?" inquired Mrs. Seymour, eagerly fixing her eyes, which wore an unquiet and troubled look, upon his expressionless face.

"You would deem me an unparalleled amplifier were I to attempt to describe some of the fanciful ideas which have at various times visited the minds of many of my patients."

"To what do you ascribe it?"

"Weakness—nothing else; though it is often accompanied by a slight derangement of the nervous system, which will subside as your general health improves. What you at present require is change of air and scene, and a little, *very little*, pleasurable excitement."

"Then I may receive my friends when they call?" said the lady, with rather more animation; "hitherto Mr. Seymour has objected to my doing so."

"He is quite right," returned Dr. Leslie, firmly; "the novelty and harmless gossip of a watering-place cannot affect you; but there would be no inconsiderable exertion and hurtful excitation in meeting and conversing with friends whom you have known for years, and in whose affairs you naturally take a warm interest."

"Perhaps a few?" suggested Mrs. Seymour, "just a few of my particular friends."

"You would scarcely know where to draw the line," said the doctor, laughing; "so many would come and claim admittance under that plea, if once your doors were thrown open."

"But I need not see them all," replied Mrs. Seymour, a smile of amusement breaking out on her face.

"You *need* not certainly," he answered, shaking his head incredulously, "though I greatly fear you would, sooner than disappoint them. Now, if you will do as I advise"—this was added more seriously—"you may in a very short time be able to set my authority at defiance."

"Well, you must tell me what you would have me do, doctor," responded his patient, languidly leaning back in her chair.

"I have been recommending Mr. Seymour to take you at once to Leamington."

"To Leamington!" echoed Mr. Seymour, in astonishment.

"Is there any other place you would prefer?" asked the doctor, fearing from her manner that she was about to raise objections to the plan; "at present it would scarcely be prudent for you to perform a longer journey."

"But you are altogether forgetting Herbert," exclaimed the lady. "I don't like the idea of leaving home until he arrives."

"In the event of his returning while you are staying at Leamington, he could join you there as easily as here," said the doctor, evasively.

"True; I was losing sight of that," soliloquised Mrs. Seymour.

"Then we may consider the matter settled," rejoined her companion, in a tone of decision; "and I hope before a week is gone to hear that you are ready to start——"

"A week! that is very soon," remonstrated Mrs. Seymour, beginning to waver.

"I am sure you will be delighted with the change," said the artful little man, skilfully driving her into a corner; "even now, I can plainly see that you are suffering from *ennui*."

"Perhaps I may be," she replied, smiling in spite of herself at his plain speaking.

"And what, let me ask you, would be your condition if you were to remain here through the winter?"

"I have no intention of doing that, doctor—you know we always spend the winter months in London."

"The gaieties of the metropolis would exercise a most pernicious effect upon you in your present state," was the emphatic answer. "I could not, therefore, on any consideration sanction your visiting it during the coming season."

"You are growing more and more arbitrary," returned Mrs. Seymour, half diverted, half annoyed; "but I suppose I must submit."

"I thought you would end by acknowledging the wisdom of my suggestions."

"Not their wisdom," disclaimed Mrs. Seymour, "only the expediency of acting upon them."

"Which is quite the same thing," quickly interposed the doctor, with his mildest professional smile.

His patient shook her head, and relapsed into silence.

Until she spoke again, Dr. Leslie continued to gaze at her from under his projecting brows. It was his daily custom thus stealthily to scan her countenance, and he often gathered more from this inferential, albeit conclusive, mode of judging of her mental and bodily soundness, than in any other way. Not a single change of expression escaped his practised eye. He noted every curve of her small mouth, every shadow that left its trace upon her snowy forehead, every restless, inquiring look she threw around her; and drew therefrom his own conclusions as to her chances of amendment.

He plainly saw that some harassing thought was just then disturbing the serenity of her mind, but he would not for the world lead her to suppose that he observed it; neither would he appear to attach the least importance to the hint she had previously given him regarding herself, although he really felt exceedingly anxious to discover what it was which had thus agitated her.

"Then you positively wish me to go to Leamington, doctor?" she remarked at length, as if in continuation of some train of thought.

"Decidedly," he answered, instantly withdrawing his spectacled orbs from her face.

"And so soon?" she asked again.

"If you propose setting out to-morrow, I should offer no objections."

"But I cannot go anywhere without Willson," cried Mrs. Seymour, glancing affectionately at her aged attendant.

"There is no reason why you should," quietly rejoined Dr. Leslie.

"But she has a great dislike to travelling, and——"

"Don't trouble about that, ma'am," said Willson, coming hastily forward; "I will gladly accompany you."

"I fear it might be a risk."

"Nothing of the kind," returned Dr. Leslie, earnestly; "the change will be almost as good for her as yourself."

"Ah! if I could believe that," said the lady. "Certainly," she went on, ponderingly, "the poor creature has been much better of late. The last tonic you gave her seems to have wonderfully revived her."

"Seeing you restored to perfect health will do more towards strengthening her than all my medicine," feelingly observed the doctor.

"Indeed, sir, you are right," assented Willson, with eager significance; "and I feel sure that if my mistress would only allow things to take their course, without troubling herself about what cannot be helped, or trying to account for every nervous fancy which happens to come across her mind, she would rapidly shake off the remains of her illness."

Dr. Leslie instantly comprehended the allusion, though he took no apparent notice of her words until he was just leaving the room, when, turning suddenly round, with the air of one who has been on the point of forgetting something which he ought to remember, he returned to Mrs. Seymour, saying, in a tone of pretended indifference,—

"I was actually going away without giving you an opportunity of explaining to me the nature of the 'strange fancy' by which you say you are frequently visited."

"I dare say you will laugh at it," she replied, anxiously scanning his countenance.

"By no means," was his gently spoken answer. "I am too much accustomed to such cases, and, I hope I may be permitted to add, too deeply interested in your own personal welfare, to feel anything but the sincere wish to be of service to you."

Thus reassured, Mrs. Seymour no longer hesitated.

"It is very odd," she said, as, unconscious of what she was doing, she began to pull out the silken threads of one of the fringed sofa pillows; "I am constantly impressed with the conviction that Herbert has really come back!"

"What is there surprising in that?" asked the doctor, looking at her in well-feigned surprise; "it is very natural for you to indulge in such pleasant anticipations."

"This is more like some strange and half-obliterated *reminiscence*," she said, putting her hand to her forehead, with a gesture of bewilderment.

"Pardon me for my obtuseness, but how can that be?" observed the gentleman in profound gravity.

"I hardly understand it," answered the poor lady, dejectedly. "I only know that various ideas are for ever floating through my mind; and when I try to grasp and analyse them, I find myself lost in the bewildering mazes of confusion. The past seems so strangely mixed up with the present, that, try as I will, I am unable to decide what has occurred recently, and what years ago. Even my illness is shrouded in mystery; for where or how it commenced, I have not the slightest recollection."

"But about Mr. Herbert?" interposed the doctor, who was extremely desirous of ascertaining the extent of her knowledge.

"Yes, I was going to tell you, doctor. Yesterday I went into the blue drawing-room, where Mr. Seymour and I have always been in the habit of spending the evenings when alone."

"Indeed *I* could not help it," murmured Willson, in a deprecatory tone, as she caught the glance of grave inquiry which Dr. Leslie directed towards her.

"Feeling rather tired," pursued Mrs. Seymour, "I sat down in my favourite chair, and closed my eyes, thinking that a few minutes' sleep would probably refresh me. When I opened them again, I suddenly remembered, or fancied I remembered, being in that very room with my husband, waiting for Herbert's arrival."

"And did he arrive?" asked the doctor with intense though necessarily repressed interest.

"Yes, I thought I heard the carriage drive up to the hall-door; and then there was the bustle of his entrance, and anxious inquiries regarding his health; after which I saw him in imagination smiling upon us with his old genial smile, and sitting hour after hour enlivening us with an account of his travels. Everything seemed so vivid, every word he uttered so clear and distinct, that I cannot forget it. Even the exact time he spent at each place is stamped upon my memory; but as I might *possibly* have learnt these particulars from his letters, I intend to read them all carefully through to-morrow."

Something like a suppressed groan came from Willson's lips as Mrs. Seymour thus announced her determination; and she looked imploringly at the doctor, who merely inquired in a tone of light, almost playful tenor,—

"And is this all that has been harassing you, my dear madam?"

"Not all," she replied, with a troubled look; "but the rest is so dim, and vague, and indescribable, that I have not yet been able to define it. I often feel a weight here," putting her hand to her heart, "and a strange sense of suffering."

"Suffering!" repeated the doctor, drawing a step nearer, and regarding her with an expression of real anxiety; "I thought you were perfectly free from pain."

"You mistake me, doctor," she hastily replied; "it is neither present nor actual suffering of which I am now speaking, but a peculiar kind of oppression, that one day takes the form of a presentiment of approaching evil, and the next consists in a cloudy retrospection of calamities already endured, either by myself or those who are dear to me. I can scarcely expect you to understand such glaring and irreconcilable inconsistencies, much less sympathise with me."

"I do both," said Dr. Leslie, with quiet emphasis, "but——"

"Oh, you are going to scold me now."

"No, I merely want to tell you that there must be no more introspection; you have been (forgive me for my bluntness, but I am a plain, straightforward man) contemplating yourself and your own affairs too long."

"What else could I think of?" she asked, mournfully.

"True, it has been so far very excusable; for I am well aware that in solitude—a state of which you have previously had no experience—one is naturally inclined to let loose the reins of the imagination, and indulge in fancies which would under any other circumstances be deemed visionary, or at least, highly coloured and exaggerated."

"But my temperament is by no means an imaginative one," thoughtfully reasoned Mrs. Seymour.

"Granting that it requires only a moderate amount of ideality to enable you to follow out in your waking moments a certain train of associations which have been suggested to your mind during the hours of sleep; and as we are told that *dreams* are uniformly the 'resuscitation or re-embodiment of thoughts which have formerly in some shape or other occupied the mind,' I can see no inconsistency in the one which causes you so much perplexity. To me, indeed, it seems the most natural thing in the world, that you should dream of your son's return."

"Dream!" echoed Mrs. Seymour almost with a start; "I never said it was a dream."

"Why should it not be?" inquired the doctor; "when awake, you are constantly thinking of Mr. Herbert, and looking forward to his arrival—in your sleep you go a step farther, and fancy he has already arrived. And now," he added, lightly, "having given you the key wherewith to unlock the mystery, I will leave you, hoping to find you more cheerful to-morrow."

He gave Willson a look in passing, which made her follow him out of the room.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

THE MISSING LETTERS.

"We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

SHELLEY.

"That mother's cheek is far paler now
Than when she last caressed him:
There's an added gloom on that father's brow
Since the hour when last he blessed him.

Oh! that all human hopes should prove
Like the flower that will fade to-morrow,
And the cankering fears of anxious love
Ever end in ruth and sorrow." ALARIC WATTS.

"THIS is an unfortunate affair," remarked Dr. Leslie, beginning to turn over the pages of a note-book which he had taken from his pocket.

"I was afraid you would think so," replied Willson, surveying him in the keenest anxiety.

"However, we will not despair," continued the gentleman, in a more hopeful tone, as he marked her evident distress. "While she remains here, she is, of course, in constant danger of being in some way or other reminded of the past; but when once removed from all these associations, and able to visit new scenes and form new acquaintances, she will be comparatively safe. In the meantime she must not be left alone for a moment, neither should she be permitted to enter any of the rooms, except her own apartments, and the one in which she is now sitting."

"But how can I prevent it, sir?" asked Willson, with a look of semi-distraction.

"Easily," rejoined the doctor, slightly elevating his eyebrows. "Tell Mrs. Morby to get the carpets taken up *instanter*, and the doors locked; and then you will have no difficulty in framing a plausible excuse in the event of the poor lady wishing to repeat her visit of yesterday."

"I am in great trouble about Mr. Herbert's letters," said Willson, lowering her voice; "if she persists in reading them, she will be almost sure to discover something."

"She must *not* read them!" exclaimed Dr. Leslie, authoritatively.

"What shall I do then, if she asks for them?" doubtfully demanded the old woman.

"Say they have been mislaid."

"Excuse me, sir," observed Willson, respectfully, yet firmly; "I cannot tell a falsehood."

"A falsehood!" ejaculated the doctor, eyeing her curiously; "why should you look upon it in that light?"

"How else can I regard it?" she said simply.

Dr. Leslie rubbed his yellow forehead in embarrassment.

"My good woman," he remarked, endeavouring to speak loftily, "I should be sorry to urge you to do anything against your conscience."

"Thank you, sir," was the humble response.

"But at the same time I really can't see what harm there is in trying by every means in our power to tranquilise Mrs. Seymour's mind; and this you know can only be accomplished by keeping her in ignorance of everything which is calculated to throw light upon the fate of her unfortunate son."

"As far as evasion goes, I do all I possibly can to prevent her from suspecting what has become of him," replied Willson, thoughtfully; "but not even to benefit her should I be justified in swerving from the truth."

"It is surprising that with your scruples you should succeed in satisfying her so well as you do," observed the doctor, in astonishment.

"I often find myself very awkwardly situated," candidly admitted Willson, "but by leaving the room for a short time whenever my mistress begins to question me more closely than usual, I generally contrive to avoid answering her."

"Well, you certainly deserve credit for your tact and good management," said the doctor rather severely; "but I must warn you that unless you keep a strict watch over yourself, this morbid love of truth may lead you—quite unintentionally, of course—to sacrifice Mrs. Seymour——"

Willson's mild eyes opened wonderfully as he said this, and she drew up her slight figure almost with a gesture of indignation.

"I hope you don't suspect me, sir, of wishing——" she began.

"I suspect you of nothing, my good woman," hastily interrupted the doctor, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself. "I spoke unadvisedly, and without reflection, forgetting for the moment how deeply indebted we all are to you——"

"Pray say no more on that subject, sir," exclaimed the old woman, instantly recovering her wonted manner of gentle placidity. "I only hope this recovery may prove a permanent one, but at present it seems almost too much to expect."

"You must not lose heart," said Leslie, soothingly.

Willson's eyes filled with tears while answering,—

"Is it likely that she will be always content to remain thus—still retaining the deepest affection for her son, and yet unable to obtain the slightest information regarding him?"

"That reminds me to give you a prescription, which I have had in reserve ever since the poor lady's marvellous resuscitation," said Dr. Leslie, tearing a page out of his note-book, and putting it into her hand; "it is only intended for cases of emergency; but if Mrs. Seymour should in the course of the day become restless and excited, or show a disposition to pursue the subject she commenced with me, you will unhesitatingly make use of it. One dose will be sufficient to

turn the current of her thoughts, and cause her, if I mistake not, to forget the threatened examination of Mr. Herbert's letters."

"But if it should fail in having this effect?" queried Willson, apprehensively.

"Then there will be no harm in administering a second,—allowing, of course, a few hours to elapse between the two doses."

"I fear this is only putting off the evil day," sighed Willson.

"Well," after a moment's reflection, during which a queer little smile disturbed the even tenor of the doctor's professional gravity," in the event of Mrs. Seymour's persisting in her present resolution, you have my full permission to accede to her wishes."

"But would that be wise?" asked Willson, in amazement.

"I will be responsible for the consequences," returned Dr. Leslie, with the same unaccountable smile.

Something in his face encouraged Willson to hope that these consequences might after all be less disastrous than her fears led her to imagine.

There was no remaining trace of a smile upon Dr. Leslie's lips when he rejoined Mr. Seymour, and repeated to him, without any comment of his own, the substance of the conversation which had taken place between himself and Mrs. Seymour.

"It's just as I feared," murmured Mr. Seymour, in accents of despair: "sooner or later she *must* know all; and then——" He stopped, and leant his elbow upon the mantelshelf, while his eyes gloomily sought the ground.

"There's no use in looking on the dark side of things," said the doctor, trying in his way to administer consolation. "I see no reason why you should abandon hope."

"It is all very well to cherish it so long as there are any tangible grounds to go upon," replied Mr. Seymour, dejectedly; "but when everything conspires to render one's plans abortive, it seems like madness attempting to swim against the tide."

"Nay, nay; it has not come to that yet," protested Dr. Leslie, with a smile.

Mr. Seymour shook his head, but a more hopeful expression came into his eyes as the doctor proceeded to speak of counteractive measures he proposed to adopt, by way of meeting this new contingency, and gave him some practical information regarding the most successful mode of lulling the suspicions which might possibly from time to time be awakened within the poor lady's breast.

After a lengthened conversation, the two gentlemen parted on the best of terms, and directly the doctor had left the house Mr. Seymour walked softly upstairs, and entering his wife's dressing-room he cast a searching glance around him, as if to make sure that it was tenantless.

Having satisfied himself on this point he hastily advanced to a small writing-table that stood in a distant corner, and taking therefrom the beautiful little gold-clasped desk in which Mrs. Seymour kept her son's old letters, he carried it off with him to his library.

At first he evidently intended to secure not only the letters, but also the desk; for, opening one of the drawers of his escritoir, he made room for it among his own private papers, and was about to lock it up, when a sudden thought served to change his purpose.

"No," he murmured, half aloud, "this will not do at all; there

would be quite a commotion in the house if the desk itself should have disappeared. Besides, it may probably contain something or other which *she* prizes, and of which we have no object in depriving her."

Thus saying, he applied himself to a careful examination of its contents.

It was a painful task, more so by far than he had anticipated.

He put Herbert's letters one by one aside, without trusting himself to read them. Nevertheless his eye caught a glimpse of a sentence or two here and there, every word of which stabbed him as with a dagger's point.

It was well for him that Dr. Leslie had so earnestly expatiated on the necessity there was for expediting matters, and taking prompt and energetic measures towards removing Mrs. Seymour, *nolens volens*, from the Park; otherwise he might have spent hours in bitter self-upbraiding and reprehensive reflections upon his cruel and unfatherly conduct.

As it was, the remembrance of the many onerous duties which required his immediate attention came to him as a sort of respite; and shaking off with a prodigious effort the cloud of melancholy thought that was beginning to enwrap him in its sable folds, he heaved a sigh of consequent relief, and lifting his son's letters he turned once more to his escritoir, touched a spring in the upper part, and deposited them in a box-like compartment, the secret of which was only known to himself. Then he returned all the other articles to Mrs. Seymour's desk, carried it upstairs, and replaced it in its former position on the writing-table; and afterwards proceeded, with a mind partially eased of its burden, to give orders respecting the dismantling of the principal apartments, and the packing of his own and his wife's wardrobe, preparatory to their departure for Leamington.

The medicine from which Dr. Leslie expected so much was not without effect.

During the remainder of the day Mrs. Seymour continued perfectly happy and contented, making no further allusion to Herbert, and appearing quite charmed with the idea of being at length permitted to leave her retirement.

The following morning, however, she again adverted to her son, expressing considerable surprise at his long-protracted absence, and desiring Willson to bring forward the before-mentioned desk, in order that she might satisfy herself as to the young man's promise and intentions, and also find out the exact amount of information she had gained from the perusal of his letters before agreeing in Dr. Leslie's pretended supposition, that the idea of his return, etc., was merely the imaginative result of a dream.

As her mistress made this request, poor Willson grew pale with apprehension. Her frightened appealing glance at Mr. Seymour, who happened to be just then in the room, brought him instantly to her side.

"It can't be helped," he murmured in her ear; "you had better do as she says."

"But I am afraid, sir!" she hurriedly replied.

"Perhaps it may not be so bad as you imagine," returned Mr. Seymour, in a low, unsteady voice.

"Not gone yet, my good Willson?" asked her mistress, looking around in astonishment.

"Just take this first, ma'am," cried the anxious attendant, suddenly recollecting the medicine; "it will keep you from being too much excited."

"You foolish woman," said Mrs. Seymour, half amused and half irritated at the delay; "you are always trying to make me believe that I am excitable."

"Even the calmest temperaments are apt at times to be roused," replied her husband, smiling, and endeavouring to speak carelessly; "and you, my dear, can scarcely expect to be able to wade through a whole budget of letters without having your interest in some degree excited by what you read.

"Yes, I dare say," responded Mrs. Seymour, in rather an unconvinced tone. "Still, in this case——"

Ere she could add another word, a wine-glass containing the medicine was unceremoniously put to her lips by Willson; and though she frowned at the old woman for interrupting her, she did not refuse to swallow the insidious draught.

Poor Willson! she was greatly in hopes that by taking this precautionary measure, she might be saved the necessity of complying with Mrs. Seymour's demand.

But it was not so. No sooner had the latter finished her dose than she impatiently pushed the glass aside, and turning to Willson, peremptorily repeated her demand.

With a sinking heart the old woman went to fulfil her behest, and after the lapse of few minutes she came back, bring the desk in her hand.

At a sign from her mistress she laid it down upon a work-table which stood close to Mrs. Seymour's chair, and then of her own accord she retreated to a distant part of the room, from whence she could—herself quite unobserved—watch the lady's slightest movement.

A smile was trembling on Mrs. Seymour's lip, and a tender light shone in her eye, as she opened the desk, and began her search for Herbert's deeply prized letters.

It is unnecessary to say that the search was unavailing.

"Dear me, what is the meaning of this?" she asked, looking up in bewilderment, when she had turned everything over. "Willson," in a quick abrupt voice, "where are the letters?"

"The letters, ma'am!" echoed the good woman, in unaffected surprise; "have you not got them?"

"Got them!" rather angrily. "No; surely *you* must know where to find them."

"I!" exclaimed Willson, completely mystified. "I assure you——"

"Just consider for a moment; what did you do with them the last time we had them in this room?"

"I put the packet into that corner," opening the desk, and pointing to the spot.

"Then where is it now?" persisted Mrs. Seymour.

Willson shook her head.

"It's very strange!" soliloquised the lady; "are you certain, my good Willson, that they really *were* returned to the desk?"

"Perfectly so; don't you remember, sir?" appealing to Mr. Seymour, who nodded assent.

"But you may have removed them afterwards?" observed her mistress, in a tone of eager inquiry.

"No; I have never even touched the desk since," confidently returned Willson, as she thought upon Dr. Leslie's proposition, and wondered whether *he* could have had anything to say to their abstraction.

CHAPTER LXXV.

SOPHISM.

"It is curious to observe the triumph of slight incidents over the mind; and what incredible weight they have in forming and governing our opinions, both of men and things—that trifles light as air shall waft a belief into the soul, and plant it so immovable within it, that Euclid's demonstrations, could they be brought to batter it in breach, should not all have power to overthrow it."—*Beauties of Sterne.*

"But who shall so forecast the years,
And find in loss a gain to match?
Or reach a hand through time to catch
The far-off interest of tears?" TENNYSON.

IT was a relief to at least two of the party when a tap at the door announced the arrival of Dr. Leslie.

He was accompanied by the celebrated London physician who had so seasonably visited Mrs. Seymour once before; but, as *she* had not the smallest recollection of ever having seen him, Leslie merely spoke of him as an old friend of his own, who was going to spend some weeks with his wife and family at Leamington, and whom he had taken the liberty of introducing, thinking that she might be pleased to make his acquaintance.

She received him reservedly, yet with an air of well-bred courtesy; while her husband came forward with an alacrity too natural to be assumed, and, holding out his hand to the stranger, expressed his pleasure at the prospect of knowing one whom he had frequently heard mentioned in terms of the deepest respect.

Having cordially responded to Mr. Seymour's salutation, the newcomer turned again to the lady, and made an attempt to engage her in conversation.

She proved for some time a very careless and unsatisfactory listener—her thoughts being still occupied with the missing letters; but the stranger, taking no apparent heed of her lack of interest, went on from one subject to another, without betraying the slightest shadow of surprise, far less impatience, at the vague and often ludicrous answers she returned to many of his questions.

Ere long, however, she became struck with the quaintness and eccentricity of his manner; and on rousing herself to observe him more attentively, she discovered that there was something very striking and original about him.

His lively and humorous temperament, his singular versatileness, and the sprightly ease and vivacious rapidity with which he discoursed on almost every topic, presented a marked contrast to the slowness and deliberation of his bodily movements.

Without appearing to have any such design, he skilfully adapted his conversation to the present state of Mrs. Seymour's feelings; and when he saw that she was really beginning to take an interest in what

he said, he proceeded to the somewhat difficult task of sounding the depth of her mental perceptibility, with the view of ascertaining whether she had, since last he visited her, made that advance towards perfect recovery which he had hoped and expected.

A long conversation ensued; and before it was ended the poor lady was insensibly led on to speak openly and unreservedly of herself and her concerns, until she seemed to have forgotten that she was admitting a new and untried acquaintance into her confidence, instead of an old and valued personal friend.

This was just what the sharp-sighted physician wanted, and you may be sure he failed not to take advantage of it, in order to further the object he had in view.

"I ought to apologise for this long visit," he said at length, slowly rising from his seat.

"Not at all," she answered, lifting her eyes earnestly to his; "I am very glad to have seen you."

"It is kind of you to say so," promptly rejoined the physician, "especially as we have, I fear, unintentionally disturbed you in the midst of an occupation which ladies generally consider as of the utmost importance."

Mrs. Seymour gazed at him in silent astonishment.

"Were you not writing letters?" he asked, smilingly pointing to the open desk.

"Oh, no," she replied, a slight cloud overshadowing her face; "I was searching for letters, not writing them."

Dr. Leslie and Mr. Seymour exchanged an intelligent glance, while the stranger said in a tone of interest,—

"Ah, that is a different employment altogether."

Mrs. Seymour assented, and then observing the look of inquiry with which he continued to regard her, she explained the cause of her disappointment.

"Very annoying," responded the physician, sympathisingly; "I have often been tried in the same way myself."

"You?" said the lady, in visible surprise.

"Yes;" and he went on to give her a spirited and amusing account of various losses he had in like manner sustained.

Bank notes, legal documents, and important papers of every description had, according to his statement, disappeared in the most extraordinary and mysterious way.

"But could you never find out what became of them?" questioned Mrs. Seymour, thoroughly bewildered by such an army of misfortunes.

"I certainly did discover the fate of some of them," replied the other, with an air of great candour. "Several," he added, a phosphorescent smile flitting over his face, "were traced to the housemaid, who, ignorant, of course, of their value, ruthlessly consigned them to the flames. Others, again, were accidentally destroyed or mislaid, but one of the most important documents I ever had was actually carried off and hidden by a little pet dog."

"Lisetta would not do that," exclaimed Mrs. Seymour, glancing apprehensively at her own beautiful favourite, who was fast asleep on its cushion.

The sophist smiled, shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing.

"Besides," pursued the lady quickly, "she could not possibly force open a desk, you know."

"Very true," was the grave, reflective answer; "if you are really certain that you *did* return these missing letters to your desk, we must instantly acquit her of any such mischievous propensities."

"I can't be quite certain," sighed the unfortunate mother, putting her hand to her forehead—a very frequent custom of hers since her illness.

"Pardon me for presuming to volunteer advice," said the stranger, in a gentle, benevolent tone; "but your own health being just now of the first consideration, it would be very unwise for you to run the risk of injuring it by allowing your mind to be further exercised on this subject. Mr. Seymour will no doubt see that a strict inquiry is at once made regarding these letters (which have been probably mislaid, and may turn up in the most unexpected manner); and if the search should be unsuccessful, you can easily write to your son from Leamington, informing him what has occurred, and asking him when he purposes returning from his travels."

Mr. Seymour started and grew pale, as the doctor, in trying to extricate him out of one difficulty, involved him in another; and it was only by a strong and determined effort that he kept back the exclamation of bitter despondency which fiercely struggled for utterance at this groundless and deceptive reasoning.

His wife, on the contrary, seemed to derive the greatest comfort and encouragement from what had been said. It acted on her as a sort of impetus, gave another turn to her thoughts, and led her, instead of continuing her lamentations, to forget her former depression, and indulge in divers anticipatory calculations and pleasant conjectural schemes, none the less plausible because based upon a false and insecure foundation.

In this comfortable frame of mind her visitors left her.

"There is nothing to alarm you," said the consulting physician, in answer to Mr. Seymour's anxious inquiries; "prudence and patience will bring everything right."

"I am glad the letters have been disposed of," observed Dr. Leslie, with a very unprofessional chuckle of gratulation.

"Yes," replied Mr. Seymour, somewhat hesitatingly; "but there's no saying what her next idea may be."

"You must always remain on the *qui vive*, my dear sir; so that, whenever she shows a disposition to advance a step in the wrong direction, *you* may be ready with a counter-move."

"Indeed, it it quite necessary," returned Mr. Seymour, smiling gloomily.

"I would not recommend you to evade her questions," proceeded the physician, "but rather to meet them openly, and try, in the event of her being visited by any inconvenient suspicions, whether you cannot gently reason her out of them. If this fail, you will generally find it easy to create at least a temporary diversion, by throwing out some new idea; giving her mind something fresh to dwell upon; putting her, as it were, upon another tack, and urging her on in an opposite direction to what she would otherwise think of adopting,"

"Happily, this requires very little skill," cheerfully interposed Dr. Leslie; "for she has one the most unsuspecting dispositions I ever met with, and is evidently accustomed to rely more upon the judgment of others than her own."

"Good!" exclaimed his Æsculapian brother, giving several brisk

little nods of satisfaction; "in that case there can be no fear of her detecting the shallowness of your arguments."

"None whatever," confidently rejoined Dr. Leslie.

"Still she seems to cling to her own ideas with considerable tenacity," objected Mr. Seymour.

"Not for long," quickly returned the other; "she is readily induced to embrace new ones; indeed, her mind has at present no power of following the same train of thought for any length of time."

Mr. Seymour looked thoughtful, but said nothing; and after considering him for a few seconds with an air of attentive interest, his visitor remarked in a tone of good-humoured significance,—

"There is a French saying which reminds us that '*step by step one goes a long way.*'"

"Thank you," said Mr. Seymour, smoothing his brow, and trying to speak hopefully; "I confess I am sometimes apt to forget what has already been accomplished, when reflecting upon the many and apparently insurmountable obstacles which yet remain to be encountered.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

MRS. MORBY MEETS WITH A CHECK.

"If we had no faults ourselves, we should not take such pleasure in observing those of others." ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"A slandering tongue is called a triple tongue, because it kills three persons; him that carries the slander, him that receives it, and him of whom it is related."

"Wrangling is the father of fighting."—*African Proverb.*

THE night before they left Mertonsville Mr. Seymour summoned the housekeeper to his presence for the purpose of questioning her as to the steps she had taken towards carrying out his instructions, and giving her any further information she might require.

She came sailing into the room, bland and deferential as ever, and respectfully waited for him to address her.

"I suppose everything has been arranged according to my orders, Morby?" began Mr. Seymour, as he pressed down the lid of his well-filled desk.

"Yes, sir, I think you will have reason to be satisfied with——"

"Exactly!" interrupted her master, who had no time to waste in mere words. "Now, it is necessary that I should explain to you some of the changes which I intend to make in my establishment."

The housekeeper's small eyes twinkled expectantly. Whatever these changes might portend to others, she felt sure that they could be productive of nothing but benefit to herself!

"I thought it probable," she said, insinuatingly, "that you might consider it advisable, in Mrs. Seymour's present state of health;—but I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir," she hastened to add, on perceiving the look of calm astonishment with which Mr. Seymour was regarding her.

"After much anxious consideration," pursued that gentleman, in a quiet, business-like tone, "I have decided on discharging all the servants—except such as you absolutely require."

"It will be far better, sir," said Mrs. Morby, complacently smoothing down her black silk apron.

"Yes, I believe this arrangement will be an advantage in many ways," mused Mr. Seymour, absently drawing his fingers through his hair; "especially as, instead of taking a house at Leamington, according to my first intention, I have engaged a commodious suite of apartments in one of the best hotels."

"Indeed, sir," murmured Mrs. Morby, starting, and biting her lip with vexation.

The idea of dismissing the whole retinue of servants had been by no means displeasing to her, because it so happened that she was just then looking out for situations for some of her own relations, and was glad of an opportunity of recommending them to Mr. Sey-

mour; but she felt excessively mortified and chagrined at his having thus altered his plans, rightly judging that it would lead to *her* being obliged to remain at the Park, instead of accompanying them as she had expected, and undertaking the sole superintendence of their *ménage*.

"Under these circumstances," added Mr. Seymour, without noticing her disappointment, "there will, of course, be no occasion for you to go with us to Leamington."

"Just as you please, sir," rejoined the housekeeper, trying to conceal the annoyance she felt at the prospect of leading a sort of hermit-like life at the Park, with perhaps a few servants as her only companions, and no chance afforded her of realizing any of those ambitious dreams in which she had of late so freely indulged.

After listening with forced attention to some additional particulars with which Mr. Seymour proceeded to furnish her, and receiving directions as to the duties which would devolve upon herself during his absence, Mrs. Morby suddenly remarked,—

"If I understand you rightly, sir, it is your wish that I should take the earliest opportunity of dismissing all your present servants?"

Mr. Seymour nodded affirmatively, and she continued, in a tone of apparent consideration,—

"There will be no difficulty in getting rid of the greater number of them, but Mr. Burns and——"

"*Burns!*" repeated Mr. Seymour, an amazed smile coming to his face; "I never dreamt of parting with *him*."

"I thought so, sir," was the clever woman's ready response; "he can, I am sure, be thoroughly trusted. But," lowering her voice, "about Browning, sir?"

"Browning! what of him?" demanded Mr. Seymour, rather anxiously.

"Well, sir," she replied, giving a significant little cough, "I fear it would not be quite safe for you to retain him in your service."

(Within a parenthesis it may be explained that, not only had Mrs. Morby conceived a violent dislike to the valet, because of his bluntness and plain-speaking, and the many instances in which he had showed his contempt for the meanness of her motives, and shrewdly detected, if not exposed, the weaknesses and blemishes of her character; but another reason why she wished him to lose his situation was, that she might secure it for a favourite nephew of hers, whom she longed to see installed in Browning's place.)

"Why would it not be safe?" questioned Mr. Seymour, knitting his brows, "don't you consider him trustworthy?"

"I should regret it exceedingly were I the means of injuring him in your opinion, sir," began Mrs. Morby, with assumed reluctance, but a look of implacability in her eyes.

"Just so," interposed Mr. Seymour, impatiently waving his hand. "Now, to the point, if you please; of what do you suspect him?"

"In the first place, sir, he is—as you are probably aware—extremely loquacious, and prides himself on his independence——"

"Yes, he has his faults certainly," mused Mr. Seymour; "still, I have always been in the habit of giving him credit for meaning well."

"I did not like telling you at the time," pursued Mrs. Morby, impressively, "but my confidence in him was greatly shaken by the

difficulty I had in persuading him to sign the paper which bore reference to Mrs. Seymour's illness."

"Do you mean to say he *objected* to affix his signature?" asked Mr. Seymour, in evident displeasure.

"Indeed, sir, he flatly refused to do so," returned the housekeeper, gravely shaking her head; "and I firmly believe he would have persisted in his determination, had he not been afraid of the consequences."

"You are forgetting the other side of the story," exclaimed a quick voice behind her.

Mrs. Morby started round with a look of conscious guilt, and found herself confronted by Browning.

That interested personage had been busily engaged in packing his master's wardrobe in an adjoining room, the door of which happened to be open. Not a word, therefore, of the foregoing conversation had escaped him; and feeling naturally indignant at the accusatory tone which Mrs. Morby thought proper to adopt in speaking of him, he (acting, as usual, upon impulse) lost no time in coming forward to justify himself at her expense.

Mr. Seymour looked at him with some curiosity.

"Why, Browning," he said, smiling quietly, "I ought to have recollected that you were in the next room."

"I had no intention of listening, sir," answered the valet, still keeping his angry eye fixed upon Mrs. Morby's perturbed visage; "but it's scarcely reasonable to expect me to remain silent after hearing my name mentioned in such disparaging terms. I cannot tamely submit to be abused without making an effort to prove my innocence."

"Certainly, you have every right to be heard in your own defence," said Mr. Seymour, assentingly; "and if your motives should have been misinterpreted, the sooner they are explained the better."

"They *have* been misinterpreted, sir," returned Browning, with concentrated scorn, "not by chance, but wilfully."

"How so?" demanded his master, glancing inquiringly from one to the other.

"Mrs. Morby only tells what suits her own purpose, sir," boldly affirmed the valet, nothing daunted by the housekeeper's darkened brow, "and the rest she conceals."

"Are you not forgetting yourself, Browning?" asked Mr. Seymour, in a tone of grave reproof.

"I assure you, sir, it is not of the slightest consequence," eagerly interposed Mrs. Morby, trying to assume an air of superiority; "I should never think of taking offence at anything *he* might say; I know him too well, and can make every allowance for his rashness and impetuosity."

"I don't want you to make allowance for me," angrily retorted Browning; "all I ask from you is *justice*, and *that* I am determined to have."

"Softly, my man," said his master, with quiet emphasis; "you can't for a moment suspect Mrs. Morby of deliberately misrepresenting your——"

"But indeed I do sir; and, what is more, I can prove it!"

The housekeeper looked as if she would like to annihilate him.

"I have had my eye on her for some time," proceeded Browning, "and could give you a hundred instances of her intriguing ways."

Mrs. Morby's cold and livid face became almost convulsed with rage as he made this daring observation, and she could scarcely restrain herself from giving utterance to the feelings which agitated her aspiring breast.

"However," continued Browning, a lofty disdain in his voice and aspect, "it is not my present intention to enter into any of these particulars" (his antagonist heaved a sigh of partial relief); "it affords *me* no pleasure"—darting a contemptuous glance at the much-aggrieved matron—"to point out the defects of my neighbours."

"Why, what else have you been doing all this time?" asked Mr. Seymour, trying to look grave.

"Oh, I was obliged in self-defence to speak plainly, sir," returned Browning; "otherwise I should not have alluded to——"

"Well, sir," hastily interposed Mrs. Morby, with an air of insinuating frankness (she had her own reasons for wishing to put a stop to the young man's elucidatory remarks), "it is just possible that I may have misjudged him. I'm sure I hope so; for it would give me sincere pleasure to think that I had formed an erroneous opinion of him. Perhaps," turning to Browning, and compelling herself to assume a friendly mien, "you may be able to account in a satisfactory manner for the reluctance you manifested when requested to sign the paper to which I have referred."

Browning said nothing, but the scornful curl of his lip and the indignant flash of his eye plainly told her that, as far as *she* was concerned, the explanation would be wholly superfluous.

"None are infallible," she sagely added, adopting a conciliatory tone, and accompanying her words with a glance made up of anxiety and entreaty; "even the most penetrating among us are capable of being deceived."

Much as Browning felt disgusted with her duplicity, he was too generous to drive matters to extremity by divulging all that he had discovered of her habitual insincerity and perfidiousness.

Addressing himself, therefore, to Mr. Seymour, he said respectfully, yet without the least appearance of cringing or servileness, "If, sir, you will take the trouble of questioning Mr. Burns on the subject, he will, I think, satisfy you that the unwillingness I showed to obey your command arose——"

"You see, sir, by his own showing, he *did* object," eagerly put in Mrs. Morby; "and, however good his secret motives may have been, I could scarcely be expected to give him credit for them."

"Go on, Browning," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, deigning no response to this interruption; "your unwillingness to obey my command," he repeated encouragingly, "arose——"

"Not from any wish on my part to gainsay it, but because I felt hurt and aggrieved at your considering it necessary to extract such a promise from us all, sir."

"How? I can't see what you are driving at."

"I fancied it was treating us with a great want of confidence, sir," boldly continued the valet.

"Want of confidence!" echoed Mr. Seymour, eyeing him in sheer amazement.

"Yes, sir; and I could not help rebelling at the terms of your request. If, instead of threatening to discharge any one who declined to do as you wished, you had simply expressed your desire, and then

left it to our own sense of honour to carry it out, I should have been the first to yield a cheerful assent; but I hated the thought of having the appearance of being forced, through mercenary motives, to take such a step, and felt as if, rather than submit to the degradation, I would prefer losing my place."

"Where on earth did you pick up those highflown notions?" cried Mr. Seymour, apparently quite bewildered by this novel representation of the case. "*Sense of honour!*" he repeated to himself with a low laugh; "who ever heard of such an absurdity? I'm afraid if *that* was all I had to depend on, the result would have been very different!"

Mrs. Morby contrived, by a series of little nods, to express her entire concurrence in this opinion.

"As for yourself," continued Mr. Seymour, after regarding the young man for a few seconds in thoughtful silence, "I really believe you are to be relied on; for a less grasping and more unselfish servant I never possessed."

Browning respectfully bent his head, and his master assuringly proceeded,—

"We will therefore say no more about your leaving us."

"Excuse me, sir," said Browning, growing exceedingly red and embarrassed; "but I have been for some time thinking of a change, and perhaps the present may be a good opportunity for me to——"

"Nonsense, my man," observed Mr. Seymour, kindly; "don't let your independent spirit lead you so far as that; it would be next to madness were you to throw up a good situation simply because of this little fracas."

"That's not it," returned the valet, hesitatingly. "I intend to give up service altogether."

"Oh, indeed!" in a slightly mocking tone. "Do you happen to have come in for a fortune lately?"

"No, sir; but just now I have a prospect of getting into a respectable business in London, and——" a brief pause, followed by renewed embarrassment—"the fact is, sir, I'm going to be married!"

"Oh, that changes the aspect of affairs," returned Mr. Seymour, smiling indulgently; "and however much I may, on my own account, regret the loss of so good a servant, I must not be selfish enough to stand in the way of your happiness."

"Thank you, sir," said Browning, in his own simple and straightforward fashion, while Mrs. Morby seemed undecided whether to be pleased or angry at this unlooked-for realization of her wishes.

"And who have you made choice of?" asked Mr. Seymour, in a tone of interest—"not one of your fellow-servants, I presume?"

"Yes, sir; it's Juliet."

"What! is Mrs. Seymour also to be deprived of her maid?"

"I am sure we would neither of us wish to inconvenience my mistress, sir: but"—directing a glance of stern severity at the housekeeper—"I don't think it would have been possible for her to retain her present situation long."

Mr. Seymour's eyes questioned Mrs. Morby, who answered with an assumption of dignity which sat very awkwardly upon her,—

"By Mrs. Seymour's express order, sir, I gave Juliet to understand some time ago that her services would not be required after a certain date."

She did not further explain that this step would never have been

taken, had she not laboured with a degree of perseverance worthy of a better cause to prejudice the poor lady's mind against her.

"Well, Browning, I doubt whether you could do better," was Mr. Seymour's concluding observation. "Juliet is a clever girl, and her mistress is, I know, entirely satisfied with the manner in which she has performed her duties, as well as the perfect propriety with which she has conducted herself since entering our service. In consideration of this, therefore, and also to mark my appreciation of your own faithfulness and fidelity, I shall see that she does not come to you portionless."

And ere the gratified valet had sufficiently recovered from his surprise and amazement to offer a word of thanks for such a liberal promise, Mr. Seymour had passed into the other room, leaving the two "kindred spirits" to the enjoyment of a *tête-à-tête*, which proved as agreeable and satisfactory as might be expected!

CHAPTER LXXVII

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

"Swiftly our pleasures glide away;
Our hearts recall the distant day
With many sighs.
The moments that are speeding fast
We heed not; but the past—the past—
More highly prize.

Let no one fondly dream again
That hope and all her shadowy train
Will not decay;
Fleeting as were the dreams of old,
Remembered like a tale that's told,
They pass away." COPLAS DE MANRIQUE.

"A millstone and the human heart are driven ever round:
If they have nothing else to grind, they must themselves be ground."

LONG before the winter was ended, Mrs. Seymour's anxiety regarding her son returned.

She regularly wrote to him, and wondered much that her letters brought forth no response, little dreaming, poor unfortunate mother, that they were destined never to meet his eye, being destroyed almost as soon as written.

As for Mr. Seymour, he watched over her with the tenderest solicitude; anticipated her every want, bore with her occasional fits of waywardness and irritability, and humoured her so patiently and gently in all her caprices, that he could scarcely be recognised as the same person who had been wont to exercise such a firm and rigorous sway over all those connected with him, quite irrespective of their own personal inclination or convenience.

He was not wholly unrewarded; for in the very act of sharing and lightening her burden, and ministering to her comfort, the anguish which gnawed at his own heart became less felt, if not to a certain extent mitigated and relieved.

When, however, towards the end of the season Mrs. Seymour began to show unmistakable signs of weariness and impatience, and resisted all her husband's efforts to soothe and console her, the latter again had recourse to their old family attendant, Dr. Leslie, who, in conjunction with the consulting physician (of whose skill they were no longer able to avail themselves, in consequence of his having returned to his professional duties in the metropolis), had already rendered him so much and efficient aid.

"It is no more than I expected, my dear sir," said the clever little man, when Mr. Seymour had with a considerably elongated face confided to him the nature of his anxieties; "we must be thankful that she has got through the winter so well. *Now* she evidently requires another change of scene."

"Perhaps after conversing with herself you may be better able to judge of her present condition," replied Mr. Seymour, as he conducted him to his wife's private sitting-room.

There he left him, thinking that Mrs. Seymour might be induced to speak more freely if unrestrained by the presence of a third person.

In about three-quarters of an hour he returned, and found her looking more cheerful and animated than she had been for some time.

"Dr. Leslie thinks these foreign posts are very irregular, and not at all to be depended upon," said she, addressing him with a smile as he entered.

"Does he?" answered her husband, feigning to treat the doctor's opinion with profound respect.

"Yes; and he has been recommending me to give up writing to Herbert. It will be far better, he says, for us to go ourselves in search of him."

"Go in search of him!" involuntarily echoed Mr. Seymour, stepping back a pace, and hiding his face from the light.

What a pang rent his heart at this casual mention of Herbert's name!

"Do you approve of this arrangement, my dear?" pursued his wife, twisting herself round in her chair, so as to read the answer in his countenance.

"I am ready to do anything that is likely to give you pleasure," he replied, gently touching her hand, but without raising his eyes.

"I thought you would say so," was her grateful response, accompanied by a glance of affection; "still, it may be inconvenient for you to go to the Continent just now," she added, doubtfully.

"By no means," hastily interposed Mr. Seymour; "there is nothing whatever to prevent our setting out immediately, if you feel so disposed."

The lady's eyes grew bright and hopeful, and she hastened away to communicate the good news to Willson, nothing doubting that by following the sympathising doctor's suggestion they would soon succeed in gaining some satisfactory and reliable intelligence respecting their truant son.

Mr. Seymour's feelings may be easier conceived than described when at length they turned their backs on Leamington for the purpose of commencing a search which would, he knew, only end in sorrow and disappointment.

Husband and wife presented a curious contrast: the one going forth so cheerful and sanguine, unvisited by a single fear or misgiving as to the result of their wanderings; the other so full of deep though silent dejection and agonising remorse because of his past and known trials, and gloomy forebodings regarding the future; and yet compelled to assume a composure which he could not feel, and make a pretence of participating in all those pleasant anticipations by which the poor lady was at this time fortunately animated, lest his apparent apathy should lead her to suspect that all was not right.

The roving and unsettled life they were obliged henceforward to follow proved peculiarly distasteful to Mr. Seymour, but he bore its varied annoyances and inconveniences with characteristic consistency, never allowing a complaint to escape his lips, even at the worst seasons, or a frown to appear on his countenance, when hearing of the wildest and most impracticable of his wife's vagaries.

It became increasingly evident to him each day that what the doctor had said about Mrs. Seymour's mind being incapable of retaining more than one idea at a time was perfectly correct.

So long as that idea lasted (whether for minutes or months), it reigned predominant, and was clung to with the greatest pertinacity; but directly a new fancy was conceived within her brain, the former one was set aside, or forgotten, and every other subject remained in abeyance.

Mr. Seymour's naturally proud and reserved disposition often received a severe shock—albeit he bore even this with Spartan inflexibility—by the familiar and unconstrained manner in which she made a point of explaining to any chance acquaintance her object in travelling, and the indiscriminate way she had of asking advice as to the best mode of prosecuting their search.

In fact, so eager and persistent did she become in her inquiries that Mr. Seymour very soon began to repent of having followed Dr. Leslie's suggestion, and would thankfully have returned home with her, could he have persuaded her to give up the pursuit.

As, however, this was out of the question, he saw nothing for it but to push on, trusting that, under any circumstances, his own watchfulness and circumspection might be sufficient to prevent her from becoming acquainted with that part of her son's history which it would only pain and distress her to know.

He had need of all his vigilance, for on more than one occasion they found themselves accidentally stopping at the very same hotel which had been patronised by Herbert and his companions some years before, and Mrs. Seymour's repeated questions would certainly have drawn from the attentive landlord everything that transpired during their stay, as well as the precise date of their visits, had not her husband taken the precaution of warning him, *sub rosa*, against such explicitness, and furnishing him with information which would enable him to answer her inquiries in a tolerably satisfactory manner.

One day they happened to be driving in an open carriage through the streets of Paris, when Mrs. Seymour suddenly started from her seat, and, in an eager, excited voice, desired the coachman to stop. She was instantly obeyed: the thorough-bred horses stood still, and the footman alighting came forward to receive his orders.

Mrs. Seymour pointed impatiently to the carriage door, and as soon as he had opened it she sprang out without giving him time to let down the steps, brushed past him, and was lost in the surrounding crowd of gay Parisians.

Her husband swiftly followed and overtook her. Not in time, however, to prevent her stepping up to a fashionably attired young Frenchman, whom (from having obtained a very imperfect view of him) she had evidently mistaken for her son.

"Herbert!" she exclaimed, laying her hand upon his arm.

The young man looked carelessly round on being thus unceremoniously addressed, thereby revealing, much to *her* surprise and disappointment, and Mr. Seymour's mortification, the features of a total stranger!

So engrossed was the poor lady with her own feelings, that it did not occur to her to offer any explanation of her conduct; but Mr. Seymour, in a few concise words, soon made the gentleman, who was all smiles and politeness, understand that it was a case of mistaken

identity, and, with a vivacious and complimentary response and succession of polished bows, he pursued his way, while the others returned to their carriage.

"I thought it was *he*," said Mrs. Seymour, in rather a peevish tone, as she sank back among the cushions; and her husband began, *sub silentio*, to wonder whether this first discouragement would have the effect of deterring her from again repeating the experiment.

It had not.

The following day saw a repetition of the same scene, though the results were somewhat different.

This time it was no foreigner, but a young and handsome Englishman, whom Mrs. Seymour singled out as Herbert *in propria persona*, and him she accordingly accosted.

He started out of a reverie, shook off her hand with a slight gesture of annoyance, and regarded her for an instant in mingled astonishment and haughty reserve. Then his manner underwent a sudden change; the proud aspect of his countenance softened, and a pleasant smile came to his lips as he inquired, while civilly raising his hat,—

"Is there any way in which I can serve you?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon," replied Mrs. Seymour, now conscious of her error; "I mistook you for my son."

"Indeed," returned the stranger, irresistibly won by her soft and gentle tones; "I am sorry to have been the unintentional means of causing you any disappointment."

"I suppose *you* do not happen to have seen him?" added the anxious mother, a ray of hope crossing her mind just as she was in the act of turning away.

Mr. Seymour joined them in time to hear the reply,—

"I hardly think it probable; but if you will inform me of his name I shall be able to speak with certainty."

"His name!" looking somewhat surprised. "Oh, to be sure," in a complacent voice, "I have not mentioned it. He is called *Seymour* Mr. Herbert Seymour!"

"What! of Mertonsville Park?" exclaimed the gentleman, coming a step nearer, and fixing his eyes upon her with an expression of awakened interest, "in ——shire?"

"I told you, my dear," said Mrs. Seymour, in a confidential aside to her husband, "that we should soon obtain some news of him. This is, I am persuaded, one of his intimate friends, who will doubtless be able to inform us of his whereabouts."

"Don't expect too much," began Mr. Seymour, in a persuasory tone; and, accustomed though he was to repress every emotion, he could with the greatest difficulty control his agitation at this trying and critical moment. "If you let me conduct you to the carriage," he went on, becoming more and more earnest and urgent, "I will return and question this gentleman as to the extent of his knowledge."

But the poor lady was too much enraptured with the discovery which she had, or fancied she had made, that she paid no heed whatever to his suggestion.

Again addressing herself, therefore, to the stranger, she said,—

"You are right, sir, we do reside at Mertonsville; but as my son has been for a considerable time absent from us, we are beginning to feel somewhat uneasy about him, and are now in search of him."

"In search of him!" echoed the young man, gazing at her in the

greatest amazement; "excuse me for asking such an impertinent question, madam, but are you really Mrs. Seymour—*his mother?*"

"Certainly," she answered, laughing and growing facetious in the plenitude of her joy; "and this," pointing to her husband, "is Mr. Seymour—his father!"

"Ah!" And the stranger's gaze was instantly transferred from herself to him.

A look of excessive perplexity crossed his features as he marked the shade of pensive thought which sat upon Mr. Seymour's once haughty brow; he had fully expected to see something different, and appeared at a loss to reconcile what he now beheld with the information he had previously received regarding his character.

"We have not yet the pleasure of knowing your own name," observed the other, getting very restless and embarrassed under the young man's prolonged scrutiny.

"Here is my card, sir,"—taking one from his pocket, and presenting it to Mr. Seymour.

"Mr. Cleveland," read the latter aloud; adding involuntarily, and with compressed lips, "a friend of Reginald Grafton's."

"You are mistaken, sir!" was the emphatic and somewhat proud reply; "*that* is a privilege I have neither the wish nor the right to claim!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Seymour, in great amazement: "I was led to understand——"

There he stopped, remembering that he was verging towards forbidden ground.

"I fancied I had explained all this to you," pursued Mr. Cleveland, "when I did myself the honour of writing to thank you for the cordial invitation you gave me to visit you at Mertonsville, and to assign a reason for my declining at the last moment to avail myself of it; but, perhaps, after the lapse of so long a time, you may have forgotten the purport of a letter which, from your not having condescended to answer it, probably contained——"

"I have no recollection of *ever* receiving a letter from you on any subject," hastily affirmed Mr. Seymour; "certainly not on *this*; for I was told that the sudden illness of one of your nearest relatives had obliged you to hasten home without a moment's delay, and that you had therefore empowered my nephew and his friend, Mr. Vernon, to explain to me the cause of your absence."

"What a base subterfuge!" exclaimed the young man, in accents of disdain; "but," lifting his hat, and tossing back his thick brown hair, "it's just like them! I wonder, however, at their being able to suppress my letter," he continued, musingly, "as I was not aware they knew I had written it."

"But what has all this to do with Herbert?" demanded Mrs. Seymour, waxing impatient. "You know him, do you not?"

Mr. Cleveland bowed.

"And can you tell us where we shall be likely to find him?"

"Is he not still at Lan——"

"I really cannot allow you to stand here a moment longer, my dear," eagerly interrupted Mr. Seymour; "you will be quite ill."

And ere she could divine his purpose he had drawn her hand through his own arm, and was leading her to the carriage, which was now almost close to them.

"Just one moment," she pleaded, looking appealingly back at the young man. "What place did you say?"

"I will ascertain that for you presently," whispered her husband, in a subdued tone.

Aloud he continued,—"I am sure when Mr. Cleveland knows you are far from strong, he will forgive you for leaving him thus abruptly."

"But I must see him again," persisted the lady, pausing with her foot on the carriage step.

"I was about to ask him," glancing inquiringly at the young man, who seemed quite at a loss to account for this strange conduct, "whether he could favour us with his company at dinner this evening."

Mr. Cleveland's eyes looked a refusal; but the lady's earnest "Yes, *do* come—I shall be so glad to see you," made him bow his acceptance, instead of adhering to his first intention.

"I will give him our address, and be back in an instant," said Mr. Seymour, after carefully assisting his wife into the carriage, and signing to the footman to close the door.

And with this as an excuse he drew Mr. Cleveland aside, saying, in a voice of deep and important meaning,—

"I am most anxious to have half an hour's conversation with you *before* you again see Mrs. Seymour. Would it be possible for you to meet me?"

"Certainly; my hotel is close at hand, and I shall be quite at your service whenever you are disposed to call," said the other, promptly anticipating his wishes.

"Thank you," returned Mr. Seymour, cordially extending his hand; "I shall not fail to take advantage of your obliging permission."

Then elevating his voice, in order that Mrs. Seymour might hear, and resuming his usual manner, he smilingly added,—

"Well, I will not detain you—we shall meet at dinner—*au revoir*."

"*Au revoir*."

And Mr. Cleveland again lifted his hat to the lady, and passed on in one direction, while the Seymours rapidly drove to their own apartments at —— hotel.

The promised visit was soon paid; and an explanation being entered into between the two gentlemen, it proved painfully interesting to them both.

Mr. Seymour's heart was too full for words when made acquainted with the circumstances attending Mr. Cleveland's first and last interview with Herbert, and told of Reginald Grafton's despicable double-dealing and treachery (in having thus surreptitiously visited Herbert Cottage, though he afterwards assured him most solemnly that he had neither seen nor heard of his cousin since the day they parted at B—— several years before); whilst Mr. Cleveland's anger at the suppression of his letter was swallowed up in sorrow as Mr. Seymour, with pale face, and terribly agitated manner, went on to tell him of his son's melancholy end, and the sad effect which it had produced upon Mrs. Seymour's constitution; and earnestly besought him to avoid saying anything in her presence which might be calculated to arouse her dormant faculties, and recall the bitterness of the past to her recollection.

Mr. Cleveland, touched with genuine pity and compassion for the unhappy man's sufferings, readily promised to act with caution. And

he kept his word, though it required a vast amount of evasion—an art in which he was by no means an adept—to elude her pointed questions which, when not definitely answered in one form, she generally repeated in another.

She conceived a violent liking for the young man's society, and pleaded so eagerly that he would himself assist them in their search, that he at length consented to spend a short time with them previous to his returning to England.

For some weeks, therefore, they travelled together, and then parted with mutual regret.

And here we also must leave them to continue their wanderings alone, while we cross the channel for the purpose of ascertaining why our hero should have forsaken his comfortable home at Lanchester, and made one of the unfortunate passengers on board the ill-fated *Burdwan*.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

HERBERT MAKES A DOUBLE DISCOVERY.

"It is not only large associations and wealthy societies, with vast machinery, that have won great things for the Church of God. How much has been accomplished by means of solitary individuals, single minds and single hearts, bringing to bear upon others the power of that special gift with which God has endowed them for His service!"

> "For such the bounteous providence of Heaven,
> In every breast implanting the desire
> Of objects new and strange, to urge us on
> With unremitting labour to pursue
> Those sacred stores that wait the ripening soul,
> In truth's exhaustless bosom. . . .
> . . . For this the daring youth
> Breaks from his weeping mother's anxious arms,
> In foreign climes to rove." AKENSIDE.

So rapidly did the work of building proceed, that the plain-looking, though substantial and commodious place of worship near Colton was nearly completed before the Snapsons (all traces of the fever having happily disappeared from the village) returned.

It was opened with every solemnity, in presence of a large and deeply interested assemblage; and from that time service was regularly performed within its walls, generally by Herbert, though he gladly accepted the aid of any evangelical minister who had it in his power to render him occasional assistance.

How eminently useful these services were, could in some measure be estimated by the numbers of artisans and other workmen who, with their wives and families, punctually availed themselves of them; but other and more practical proofs of their beneficial influences were not wanting. Once, to the unbounded surprise of every one present, Mr. Snapson (wishing at last, perhaps, to testify his public appreciation of our hero's efforts to elevate the morals of his *employés*) entered the recently erected chapel, and, quietly taking his seat with the others, listened with at least outward respect to that Word, the entrance of which giveth light. He was of course accompanied by Albert, with whom Herbert was still a prodigious favourite, and who was himself in the constant habit of going with Henry to hear him preach.

For about six months Herbert laboured steadily on in the same direction.

Then his little book was published concerning Africa and its unchristianised inhabitants, a subject on which he had long thought and felt deeply; and on its first appearance the Lanchester Exploration Society, which had been lately established under peculiarly

favourable auspices—the said society comprising many of the most talented and influential members of the community—came forward and unanimously offered to treat with him on the most liberal terms, if he would consent to proceed at once to Central Africa, in order to set at rest some questions of startling import which had of late been raised respecting the country, by giving them the benefit of his own personal investigation and researches.

The prospect was rather a tempting one to Herbert, especially as he happened about this time to make a double discovery—one relating to James Gordon, the other to himself.

In the first place it became evident to him that Gordon—who had lost no opportunity of improving himself by reading and study since his arrival at Lanchester, and was now a man, if not of brilliant attainments, yet of considerable practical knowledge and intelligence, besides being one of the most devoted and consistent Christians it had been his good fortune to meet—would, with a trifle more experience, be fully capable of undertaking his duties, in the event of his concluding to accept the society's proposal.

His second discovery was of a very different and purely personal nature—neither more nor less than this: He found that in spite of his habitual caution and circumspection, and the painful sacrifices he often made to a sense of duty, a new and absorbing interest had gradually been springing up in his mind, without his knowledge, certainly without his consent, until he suddenly found himself, to use a hackneyed expression, deeply and hopelessly in love!

Why hopelessly?

Because he felt that situated as he was he would be no fit match for the beautiful and attractive Ella Stanley. Her very wealth was in his eyes an insuperable obstacle, and his whole nature revolted at the idea of his being regarded in the light of a mercenary fortune-hunter! Had she been poor, how gladly would he have come forward and shielded her from every threatened cloud, and by his own exertions supported her in the same position to which she was alike by birth and education entitled! but what was he—these were his thoughts—that he should presume to enter the lists against the numbers of suitors who surrounded her, all of them in better and more affluent circumstances than himself, and many of them known to be men of high character, worth, and integrity? How could *he* hope to succeed where these failed? or, granting that he *was* successful in gaining the young lady's affections, prudential considerations on the part of Lady Stanley, who naturally looked for a suitable and more brilliant alliance for her daughter, would render this of little avail, and might only be the means of inflicting suffering upon another—and that other the one for whom he would cheerfully endure the most excruciating torture rather than subject her to a moment's pain.

Better, far better (so he reasoned), bury his love deep within his own breast than expose *her* to sorrow; and though his attachment was of the strongest kind, founded upon the firm basis of esteem, and strengthened and increased by the intimate knowledge he had acquired of her principles and conduct, the sweetness and equability of her disposition, the gentleness and refinement of her manner, and, better still, the decided religious tone which had for many months pervaded her whole character—he could not, in justice to herself,

continue as heretofore to visit the young baronet's house, lest he should, in some unguarded moment, be led into betraying the real state of his heart. His only safety lay in avoiding Ella Stanley's society for the future, and this he was resolved to do.

He soon, however, discovered that in order to adhere to his determination he must leave the neighbourhood of Lanchester; for Sir Edward called so frequently at the cottage, and reproached him so earnestly for having deserted them, that he could not long persist in repelling his advances without being able to assign a sufficient reason for doing so. It is true he might, by admitting Sir Edward into his confidence, and frankly explaining how matters stood with him, have obtained his sympathy and assistance; but, knowing the young man's ardent affection for himself, and also remembering how he was situated with regard to his sister, he felt that to ask his advice on so delicate a subject would be taking an unfair advantage of him, to say nothing of the exceedingly embarrassing position in which he would thereby be placed.

He placed a double guard, therefore, upon himself when in Sir Edward's presence, lest he should unconsciously furnish him with a clue to his conduct.

His friend plainly perceived that something was amiss, though he restrained himself from making any remark which could lead him to suppose he had observed it.

Even James Gordon was puzzled at the strangeness of Herbert's conduct at this particular juncture. He appeared so unusually quiet and thoughtful—almost reserved at times—so wishful to be alone; while his face wore that peculiar look of anxious consideration which showed that his mind was exercised deeply—on what subject Gordon was quite at a loss to understand.

However, this period of mental indetermination did not last long. With Herbert to *resolve* and to *act* seemed synonymous terms; and when once the path of duty was clearly marked out before him, he hesitated not to follow it, in spite of every obstacle and discouragement.

His first step, after debating the matter with himself, and seeking the Divine blessing upon his decision, was to communicate the result to James Gordon.

He, poor man, was totally unprepared for such an announcement, and would not for a considerable time be persuaded that Herbert was really in earnest.

"It's impossible!" he cried at length, passing his hand hastily across his eyes, "utterly impossible! You would never think of breaking up your home here, and leaving your friends? Just as you are beginning to get so well known, too, and so much beloved! O sir, don't do it!"

And his eager, beseeching tones might have moved a stone.

"My dear James, I *must!*" said Herbert, with gentle firmness. "I have looked at the matter from all points, considered every *pro* and *con*, weighed each advantage and disadvantage, and finally committed my way unto the Lord; and *now* I feel convinced that my duty lies in the direction I have specified."

"Well, if the thing proceeds from the Lord, I suppose we must submit," replied Gordon, looking greatly disturbed; "but it seems very hard."

"Remember, my good friend, that the present arrangement will expire in three years," remarked Herbert, in a tone of encouragement; "at the end of that time we must hope to meet again."

"Three years!" ejaculated Gordon, almost with a groan; "no one knows what may happen in that time!"

"Except God," mildly remonstrated Herbert. "He knows the end from the beginning."

"But (forgive me if I seem rude, sir), do you think it is your duty to forsake this neighbourhood, where you have been, and still are, doing so much good? Who will care for the people when you are gone, and carry on your meeting, and——"

"*You*, my friend!" said Herbert, laying his hand upon the other's arm, and gazing earnestly into his face.

"*I!*" exclaimed Gordon, starting back in unfeigned amazement; "what could I do, sir?"

"Listen to me, James. One evening—you may perhaps recollect it—I was detained at the Colton Station much longer than usual, and could not reach the chapel in time for the commencement of the service."

"Yes, I remember," assented Gordon.

"Well, when I did at last arrive, fully expecting that the meeting had dispersed, I found, to my intense surprise and pleasure, that you had yourself begun——"

"It was only a prayer-meeting, sir," murmured Gordon, averting his face.

"Perhaps so; but I stood for a few minutes inside the door, and, without being myself observed, heard you expounding a portion of Holy Writ with such clearness and earnest fluency, that my attention was irresistibly chained, and I felt it would be a positive sin for you to neglect the gift which God has given you."

"O sir," remonstrated Gordon, with an expression of genuine humility, "don't try to persuade me that I should be capable of supplying your place; the very idea is preposterous! If, indeed," he went on, reflectingly, "I had had sufficient time to qualify myself in some measure for the important work, I might have had less hesitation in undertaking it, though even then I fear I could never hope to succeed as I should wish."

"What would you think of going to the —— College, for a year, James? it might give you confidence and——"

"I had some idea of that at one time," replied Gordon, evidently not ill-pleased at the suggestion; "but," slowly weighing his words, "what would become of the work here meanwhile?"

This obstacle Herbert found no difficulty in meeting, as he had only the preceding evening made the acquaintance of an earnest Christian missionary who had just returned from Caffraria for the benefit of his health, and was ready to engage in some good work during his stay in Lanchester, without any further remuneration than the use of a suitable dwelling-house.

"Well, I must say I can't understand it," said Gordon, with a shade of impatience in his tone, when Herbert had answered all his other objections; "if it is really necessary for you to go to Africa, why may I not accompany you?"

"There are several reasons against it, James. First of all, there's

your aunt to be considered. Ought you not to stay and take care of her?"

Gordon looked perplexed. He had quite lost sight of her.

"Then it would, I think," added Herbert, "be a great pity for us to break up our little establishment here for so short a period as three years."

"But if this gentleman requires the house——" began Gordon.

"Only a small part of it," hastily explained Herbert, "and that merely for a year."

"No doubt it's selfishness on my part, wishing to keep you here," said Gordon, presently, in a voice which spoke of various and conflicting feelings; "but we have been so happy together."

"We have, James," answered Herbert, grasping his hand with emotion, and then turning suddenly away, as if afraid to trust himself to continue the subject.

"Have you spoken to Sir Edward of your intentions?" inquired Gordon, after a moment's pause.

"Not yet; I wanted to tell you first."

"Ah! then I may safely leave the matter in his hands," returned the other, with an expression of relief. "He will use all his influence to try and get you to alter your decision."

"*That* cannot be!" said Herbert, setting his lips firmly together.

Well, we shall see," thought Gordon, as he slowly left the apartment; "unless I am mistaken in my judgment of Sir Edward, his arguments will prove unanswerable."

But a few days later he was forced to confess that he *had* been mistaken; the baronet's earnest and affectionate persuasions and appeals having been quite as unavailing as his own.

Mr. Snapson received the news with every outward manifestation of civil regret, though it caused him much internal satisfaction.

Hitherto he had utterly failed in inducing Albert to adopt that proud and reserved manner towards his subordinates which he considered so indispensable for a person of his substance and importance; and this he ascribed, perhaps with reason, to the influence which Herbert unconsciously exercised over him; but though their visit to London had not had the desired effect of lessening that influence, it would be strange, indeed, he argued, if it were to survive an absence of three years!

Albert was himself extremely amazed and indignant when he was informed of Herbert's plans, and freely expressed his disapproval of them.

When, however, he found that his impetuous expostulations brought about no change in the arrangements, he altered his tone, and declared, much to his father's horror and dismay, that he and Henry would go with him!

"My dear Albert," exclaimed Mrs. Snapson, who was listening to him as he made this proposal, which he did with the utmost seriousness, "do you know what you are talking about?"

"Of course I do, mamma," he answered, opening his eyes very wide at the question; "I think it would be a capital plan. What say you, papa? *Here*, you know, we are neither of us any use to any one; but out there we should find many ways of helping Mr. Seymour."

"I'm afraid I must decline your services," said Herbert, playfully stroking him on the head. "It would be far too great a responsibility for me to take charge of——"

"Now, don't be cross," coaxingly interrupted the lad; adding in a confidential tone, "if *you* will agree to our going, I'll soon get papa's consent."

"You are reckoning without your host there, my boy," cried Mr. Snapson, looking almost as much terrified as if the thing were really settled. Do you suppose you should ever get *me* to countenance you in such a mad freak as this?"

"Yes. Why not, papa?" asked Albert in perfect simplicity. "I'm sure I see no harm in it."

"If Henry wishes to make a fool of himself," replied his father, beginning as usual to vent his spleen upon his unoffending step-son, "there is no reason why *you* should do the same."

"How have I been making a fool of myself?" demanded Henry of his mother, in rather a vexed tone.

He had entered the room just in time to hear Mr. Snapson's complimentary observation regarding himself.

Before the lady could reply, Albert had rushed up to him, and, seizing him by the hand, exclaimed excitedly,—

"What is your opinion, Henry? would you like to go?"

"Like to go *where?*" asked Henry, in undoubted ignorance of his meaning.

"To Africa—with Mr. Seymour and me."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said the young man, laughing and shrugging his shoulders.

"Don't you agree with me in thinking that it would be a pleasant way of spending a year or two?" persisted the lad.

"I should be sorry to try it," replied his brother, with a comical expression of disgust.

"Would you?" in apparent surprise—"why?"

"Because I prefer being where I am; and *you* would, too, I suspect, if you knew the sort of life you would have to lead."

Mr. Snapson nodded assentingly—it was almost the first token of approbation that Henry had ever received from him.

But Albert was by no means convinced by his brother's argument.

"It's a great pity, Henry," he said, rather contemptuously, "that you should be so tame-spirited—there's scarcely a particle of energy or enterprise in your nature, I believe; I do wish you would be a little more adventurous, old fellow."

The "old fellow" laughed very unconcernedly. He was quite inured to Albert's candid exposition of his character, and never attempted to defend himself from his good-humoured, though often inconvenient attacks.

"It is very absurd of you to call Henry tame-spirited," remarked the impulsive Arabella, firing up at the imagined insult to her favourite brother, "merely because he——"

"Nonsense, Arabella," interposed her mother, with a warning glance in the direction of Mr. Snapson, who was saying something in an earnest, suppressed voice to Herbert; "why should you take up every word the child utters in that serious fashion? You might have known he was only joking."

"I can't endure such jokes," muttered the proud girl below her breath. "Tame-spirited, indeed!" with a curl of her lip; "how can he be otherwise, poor fellow?"

She was the more irritated at the epithet from the fact of her having been accustomed to employ it herself, when accusing Henry of weakness and subserviency in yielding such implicit submission to Mr. Snapson's authority, instead of openly rebelling against many of his tyrannical impositions.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

PENRUTHVEN MOUNT.

"The gentle wave
Kissed, with a sweet embrace, the seaworn beach,
And the wild song of winds came o'er the waters;
The mingled melody of wind and wave
Touched like a heavenly anthem on the ear,
For it arose a tuneful hymn of worship."

LONGFELLOW.

"A generous friendship no cold medium knows."

BEFORE taking leave of Mr. Snapson, Herbert promised him that he would use all his influence with Albert to prevent him from pursuing the subject which just then occupied his mind.

It was not easy to persuade the high-spirited and much-indulged lad that what he now proposed was beyond the limits of reason; for, accustomed as he had been to have every whim gratified, he could not understand being thwarted in the present instance.

When at last he saw that it would be useless to persist in his determination, he sank into a low and dejected state, from which Herbert found great difficulty in rousing him.

"You must not give way like this, my dear Albert," said his friend, throwing his arm around him—they were alone together in Herbert's study—and lifting up his face, which had been buried in his hands, "or else you will make yourself ill, and then your father will regret that you had ever seen me."

"I shall never be able to get on without you," replied the boy, with passionate emphasis—"*never!*"

And the tears which he had hitherto successfully fought against burst forth in a perfect torrent.

"Try and bear it like a man, my poor Albert," said Herbert, in tones which showed that he could hardly maintain his own composure. "For my sake," he whispered softly, on finding that he still remained overwhelmed with grief. "You know it is far worse for me than for you."

"How is it worse for you?" inquired the boy, looking up with quivering lips.

"Because I am leaving every one I love behind me," was the tremulous answer, "and shall soon be a solitary stranger in a strange land; whereas you, my dear Albert, will still have all your friends about you——"

"Not all, if *you* are gone," said the lad, plaintively; "no one else cares whether I do right or wrong."

"You mustn't say that."

"But it's true. Arabella regularly scoffs at religion and religious people; while mamma only troubles herself about what looks well in the eyes of her own grand relations; and as for papa——"

"Hush, Albert!" said his friend, in a tone of gentle reproof; "you are forgetting the fifth commandment."

"I expect I shall forget it far oftener when you are away," he replied, impetuously.

"Why so?" asked Herbert, in some surprise.

"If you can't keep me straight, nobody can."

"Keep you straight?" repeated Herbert, scarcely understanding his meaning.

"Yes," continued Albert, dejectedly, "it will be quite useless trying to conquer my faults alone. I thought you would have helped me; but now——"

He stopped with a gesture of impatience, and, throwing himself disconsolately back in his chair, took out his handkerchief and rubbed his eyes with it.

"Do you suppose you *have* any faults?" questioned Herbert.

"To be sure I have—hundreds!" was the characteristic reply, accompanied by a glance of extreme astonishment.

"And do you really wish to conquer them?"

"Yes, but it's not much good—the more I want to get rid of them the stronger they become."

This was to Herbert an unlooked-for admission; as, notwithstanding Albert's perfect candour and the unconstrained freedom with which he expressed himself on every other subject, he had always avoided applying the young man's instructions in any way to himself.

"Have you ever tried to get rid of them?" inquired Herbert, with awakened interest.

"Indeed, I have," in a very desponding tone.

"And how did you set about it, my dear Albert?"

"Oh! I made up my mind that I would turn over a new leaf, and never speak cross to Arabella, or force Henry to do what he doesn't like; but the fact is, I found it more difficult than I expected, and now I am not a bit better than I was before."

"I quite understand that," said Herbert, seriously; "it's no easy matter endeavouring to make a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

"Is that me?" demanded the boy, in his quaint and simple fashion; "do you call me a corrupt tree?"

"Yes; you, and I, and every one. We are all by nature evil, we hav all gone astray; there are none righteous; for however much we may outwardly reform our conduct, the heart remains unchanged, and we are still sinners in God's sight. Therefore, until we perform that one simple act which Himself has commanded we may be said to have done literally nothing."

"What act do you refer to?" eagerly inquired Albert.

"You scarcely need to be told," returned the young man, taking up his little Bible, and opening it at St. John vi.; "but I will read you Christ's own reply to those who asked Him what they should do that they might work the works of God,—'Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'"

"Is that all?" questioned Albert, after a short pause.

"Is it not enough? To believe in Christ, you know, implies a great deal."

"Does it?" rather listlessly.

"It shows that, having discovered our lost and ruined condition, as

guilty sinners, deserving of nothing but condemnation, and renouncing all dependence upon ourselves, we have fled for refuge to Christ, and in the very act of committing our souls unto Him—believing in Him as able and willing to receive us—trusting implicitly in His glorious work and finished righteousness, we are saved. Do you understand me, Albert?"

"Yes"—slowly and hesitatingly—"I think so."

"Then won't you begin at the beginning, my boy?"

"Well, I'll try," said Albert, his eye flashing out with a feverish brightness; "there's nothing I should like better than to grow up like one of those good and noble philanthropic fellows we read of. Only fancy how nice it must be to establish schools, found charities, build churches, and visit hospitals!"

"In the meantime," said Herbert, smiling at his enthusiasm, "you must bear in mind that the surest way of doing good is to be good."

The sudden entrance of Sir Edward Stanley rendered Albert's reply inaudible.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," exclaimed Herbert, rising and greeting the new-comer in considerable surprise; "I thought you were from home."

"I have only just returned," replied his friend, possessing himself of the nearest chair.

"I hope nothing is the matter?" proceeded Herbert, hurriedly, and with a certain perturbation of manner which he vainly strove to suppress. "How is Lady Stanley, and—and your sisters?"

"All quite well when I left them this morning," said Sir Edward, reassuringly; "they are still staying with our relations at Scarsdale, but I was obliged to shorten my own visit, as I find it is absolutely necessary that I should run down to Cornwall for a few weeks, and see how my new steward is managing the property. Won't you take pity upon my loneliness," he added, in a tone of earnest entreaty, "and go with me?"

"I! my friend!" said Herbert, starting slightly; "how could I possibly——"

"Yes, do go, sir," interposed Gordon, who had made an errand into the room; "it will be a nice change for you."

"You forget how little time I have," remonstrated Herbert.

"There are still three weeks left," continued Gordon.

"But I intended to spend them with you, James."

"I know it, sir; still it would be extremely unreasonable of me to wish to keep you all to myself; and as Sir Edward is naturally anxious to have a little of your society before you leave us, I think you should devote the next fortnight to him."

Herbert shook his head dissentingly; but finally their united arguments and persuasions prevailed, and he agreed to do as they proposed.

I need hardly say he would never have come to this decision had not Sir Edward's information regarding his mother and sisters removed any scruples he might otherwise have felt, by showing him that—Ella being absent—there could be neither danger nor impropriety in accepting his friend's invitation.

"That's right, my dear fellow," cried Sir Edward, exultingly, as soon as Herbert had yielded his consent. "Now, Gordon, will you see that he is ready to start by the first train in the morning?"

"All right, sir; you may trust me for that," confidently returned the other.

"Then I will set about my own preparations," said Sir Edward, rising to leave the room; "and—— but, dear me, what is the meaning of this?" he asked, in amazement. "Albert crying! My dear boy," bending kindly towards him, "is there anything wrong with you?"

"Of course there is, and you are the cause of it!" answered the excitable boy, dashing aside his tears, and looking up with sparkling indignant eyes. "Why should you come and take him away before his time? Do you suppose nobody loves him but you? I think it's very unkind of you?"

Here his voice sank into a kind of pitiful quiver.

Sir Edward stood for a moment quite perplexed.

"We must consider others as well as ourselves, you know," remarked Gordon, in a consolatory whisper. "I'm sure you would be the last to wish to keep him here——"

"Indeed, you are very much mistaken," interrupted Albert; "for I *do* wish him to stay here; and it's not so selfish as Sir Edward after all. *He* wants to carry him off to Cornwall, where he doesn't know a soul; but *here* there are hundreds who would be glad for him to remain."

"Well, I seem to have got myself into a precious predicament," said the baronet, laughing good-humouredly; "and the only way I can perceive out of it is to suggest that you should join our party. What say you, my young madcap? will you go with us?"

"I am not a madcap," replied Albert, in a serious, matter-of-fact voice, "and I don't think I can go with you."

"Why not?" inquired Herbert, who was delighted at the idea of drawing the two closer together; "do you suppose Mr. Snapson would object?"

"It isn't exactly that," was Albert's slow and hesitating reply; "but if I were to do it, it would look as if I really *were* selfish."

"Never mind the look of the thing," said Sir Edward, encouragingly; "what does it signify if it's not true?"

"But I'm rather afraid it was true," candidly confessed Albert; "for I believe I was thinking of myself all the time, though I did pretend to the contrary."

A smile full of softness and sweetness played on Herbert's lips as, turning to the strangely anomalous lad, he said,—

"Now, Albert, run home and ask your father whether you may accept Sir Edward's invitation."

"Shall I?" he inquired, in a tone which showed that though he was really desirous of following Herbert's advice, he felt that after what had occurred he ought to refrain from doing so. "Will it not appear mean?"

"Nonsense," laughed Sir Edward, who was greatly amused at his unsophisticated manner.

"Well, I'll be off," observed Albert, conclusively, after eagerly scanning Herbert's countenance. "What shall I say?"

"Give my compliments to your father, and——"

"Would you mind writing a line?" suggested Herbert, in a low tone; "Mrs. Snapson has such a marvellous respect for all these minor points of etiquette."

"So be it, then," rejoined the baronet, slightly shrugging his shoulders.

And sitting down at the table, he took the pen which Herbert put into his hand, and wrote a civil note to their manufacturing neighbour, requesting that Albert might be permitted to accompany them into Cornwall, and spend a fortnight with them at Sir Edward's seaside residence.

In less than ten minutes a servant in a smart livery brought an answer to the effect that Mr. Snapson would do himself the pleasure of calling at the cottage in half an hour, when he would be able to give some definite reply to Sir Edward's polite invitation.

Herbert instantly guessed that nothing less than a diversity of opinion between the two parents could have occasioned this delay; and, as he was really anxious on Albert's own account that he and Sir Edward should become better acquainted, he awaited Mr. Snapson's arrival with great interest.

That gentleman's first words, when at length he made his appearance, showed them that whatever may have been his original intention, he was now prepared to yield a hearty assent to the baronet's wishes.

With this exception, however, that the visit should terminate in a week instead of a fortnight, as he could not bear the idea of being deprived of his son's society for a longer period.

At an early hour the following morning they started (James Gordon having voluntarily charged himself with Herbert's outfit, etc., was unable to accompany them), and reached their destination the same evening.

A large and irregular-looking building, with gable ends and innumerable windows, standing isolated and alone upon a rocky eminence, within sound and sight of the restless ocean—this was Penruthven Mount, Sir Edward Stanley's estate.

Though no definite plan seemed to have been adhered to, and no particular style of architecture adopted in its erection, there was a certain *prestige* and grandeur about the old house which showed that it had in past days been a residence of very considerable pretensions.

A flight of steps from the outside led to a sort of terrace with a marble pillar at either end, and several curious little statues in the centre, each furnished with an ornamental vase containing some of the gardener's choicest flowers.

Beyond, looking seaward, lay the pleasure-grounds, which had at first sight the appearance of having been formed on the steep base of the cliff; and still farther, on a narrow winding pathway, partially concealed by the jutting rocks which abound on that wild and rugged coast, conducted those who did not mind the inconveniences of so rough and uneven a road to the shore.

Thither Herbert constantly betook himself. The silence, almost desolation, that reigned around him suited him well—it was precisely what he needed, perfect rest, both of body and mind. Nevertheless, as he lingered hour after hour amidst the granite rocks, gazing over the vast ungovernable sea, he learnt a variety of lessons, and drew deep draughts of soul-inspiring strength from the contemplation of its fluctuating and wonder-working billows.

For two days after their arrival at Penruthven Mount Sir Edward had little time to devote to anything but business.

He accompanied the steward over the whole of his large estate, surveyed the various alterations and improvements which had been effected in the property since last he had seen it, and gave instructions regarding its future management.

Knowing, therefore, how many matters there were which required the young man's personal attention, Herbert was not in the slightest degree surprised when, on the morning of the third day, Sir Edward (having attentively perused a letter he had found near his plate at breakfast) rose hastily from his seat, and, with a few words of apology for his abrupt departure, and an assurance that he should return in time for dinner, left the room, and ten minutes later the house.

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED.

"Ask what is human life—the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good—
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair." COWPER.

"Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own." COWPER.

On entering the drawing-room that evening, after taking a long and interesting pedestrian excursion with Albert, and making acquaintances in some of the fishermen's huts, Herbert started back in the greatest amazement.

The colour instantaneously flushed over his face, and as instantaneously retired, leaving it several shades paler than it was before.

His eye gave one quick pleasurable flash, his heart one throb of wild, tumultuous joy—*then* the gleam of gladness died away, a shadow, so slight as to be scarcely perceptible clouded his brow; he pressed his lips firmly together, and resuming his usual calm deportment went forward.

He had not advanced more than a step or two when he was met by Lady Stanley.

"I am delighted indeed to find you here," she said, cordially extending her hand, and regarding him with one of her tender motherly glances.

"Judging from Mr. Seymour's appearance, mamma, your feelings are not reciprocated," exclaimed the piquant Lucy, coming up to them, and smilingly offering her own hand.

"How easily people are deceived!" thought Herbert, as, having replied to their civilities, he went through the same form with Ella.

In *her* case it really seemed a *mere* form, for he spoke to her without even venturing a glance at her fair face, radiant with youth and beauty, and then turned abruptly away, and replied to the greetings of Colonel Lansmore.

"I have neither forgotten you, nor your wonderful musical skill," said that gentleman, after presenting Herbert to his wife, a tall gaily dressed and somewhat sharp-visaged lady of about forty.

Herbert bowed.

"Now, uncle, I must beg of you that you will refrain from offering Mr. Seymour any compliments," remarked Lucy, in a tone of mock seriousness; "since last you met him, he has, I regret to inform you, greatly deteriorated."

"My dear Lucy," observed Lady Stanley, reprovingly, "you surely do not know what you are saying."

"Pray don't interrupt her," said Herbert, with a smile (he always felt safe with Lucy, and was rather amused at her badinage). "I have no doubt it is perfectly true in more ways than one."

"Ah! you think that by thus candidly acknowledging your errors I shall be induced to withdraw my accusation," returned Lucy, playfully shaking her finger at him; "but I cannot let you escape so easily."

"What is the nature of your charge, my dear?" inquired the Colonel, with a little twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"To tell you the truth, uncle, he has grown dreadfully reserved and unsociable; I will not say morose." This was added with an arch, meaning glance at Herbert. "I only hope it may not end in his being caught in the meshes of cynicism and misanthropy, but I greatly fear——"

A mysterious pursing of the lips finished the sentence.

"Now, Lucy, this is positively disgraceful," exclaimed Sir Edward, with considerable warmth; "I no longer wonder at the tongue being called the 'woman's sword.' Whatever others may do, I can testify that *you* never suffer it to rust."

"I should hope not indeed," laughed the gay-hearted girl, her dark eyes sparkling mirthfully.

"It shows, however," continued her brother, in a graver tone, "that your knowledge of Herbert's character must be a marvellously circumscribed one; otherwise you would scarcely dream of giving him credit for any such tendencies."

"I appeal to you, uncle," said Lucy, assuming an injured air; "are we not fully justified in judging of people by their actions?"

"In most cases, yes," replied the Colonel, leaning comfortably back in a capacious arm-chair, "though it would be hardly fair to apply the same test to every one, as there are some cases wherein circumstances conspire to render it expedient for them to appear as it were *incog.*"

"I can't understand that kind of reasoning," laughed Lucy. "It seems to me very inconclusive."

"Supposing we allow the matter to stand over *ad referendum*," returned her uncle, rising to his feet at the sound of the dinner bell, and offering an arm to each of the young ladies.

"A very good suggestion," said Lady Stanley, leading the way to the dinning-room with Herbert; "you must not mind Lucy's raillery," she went on, addressing the young man in a half-whisper.

"She affects to be very indignant with you for absenting yourself from our house for such a time, and will not, I fear, cease to banter you on the subject."

"Is it quite impossible for me to convince her and yourself that duty, not inclination, was the cause of my absence?" replied Herbert, in the same confidential tone; "had I merely consulted the latter, or discovered a way of reconciling the two, my visits would have been far more frequent."

"Well, I am bound to believe you," answered the lady, with a thoughtful glance at his agitated countenance; "I know from experience that pleasure and duty are not always compatible."

"Then, may I hope that you at least will acquit me of rudeness and ingratitude?"

"I never blamed you, even in thought," said Lady Stanley, quickly,

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED.

"Ask what is human life—the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good—
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair." COWPER.

"Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own." COWPER.

ON entering the drawing-room that evening, after taking a long and interesting pedestrian excursion with Albert, and making acquaintances in some of the fishermen's huts, Herbert started back in the greatest amazement.

The colour instantaneously flushed over his face, and as instantaneously retired, leaving it several shades paler than it was before.

His eye gave one quick pleasurable flash, his heart one throb of wild, tumultuous joy—*then* the gleam of gladness died away, a shadow, so slight as to be scarcely perceptible clouded his brow; he pressed his lips firmly together, and resuming his usual calm deportment went forward.

He had not advanced more than a step or two when he was met by Lady Stanley.

"I am delighted indeed to find you here," she said, cordially extending her hand, and regarding him with one of her tender motherly glances.

"Judging from Mr. Seymour's appearance, mamma, your feelings are not reciprocated," exclaimed the piquant Lucy, coming up to them, and smilingly offering her own hand.

"How easily people are deceived!" thought Herbert, as, having replied to their civilities, he went through the same form with Ella.

In *her* case it really seemed a *mere* form, for he spoke to her without even venturing a glance at her fair face, radiant with youth and beauty, and then turned abruptly away, and replied to the greetings of Colonel Lansmore.

"I have neither forgotten you, nor your wonderful musical skill," said that gentleman, after presenting Herbert to his wife, a tall gaily dressed and somewhat sharp-visaged lady of about forty.

Herbert bowed.

"Now, uncle, I must beg of you that you will refrain from offering Mr. Seymour any compliments," remarked Lucy, in a tone of mock seriousness; "since last you met him, he has, I regret to inform you, greatly deteriorated."

"My dear Lucy," observed Lady Stanley, reprovingly, "you surely do not know what you are saying."

"Pray don't interrupt her," said Herbert, with a smile (he always felt safe with Lucy, and was rather amused at her badinage). "I have no doubt it is perfectly true in more ways than one."

"Ah! you think that by thus candidly acknowledging your errors I shall be induced to withdraw my accusation," returned Lucy, playfully shaking her finger at him; "but I cannot let you escape so easily."

"What is the nature of your charge, my dear?" inquired the Colonel, with a little twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"To tell you the truth, uncle, he has grown dreadfully reserved and unsociable; I will not say morose." This was added with an arch, meaning glance at Herbert. "I only hope it may not end in his being caught in the meshes of cynicism and misanthropy, but I greatly fear——"

A mysterious pursing of the lips finished the sentence.

"Now, Lucy, this is positively disgraceful," exclaimed Sir Edward, with considerable warmth; "I no longer wonder at the tongue being called the 'woman's sword.' Whatever others may do, I can testify that *you* never suffer it to rust."

"I should hope not indeed," laughed the gay-hearted girl, her dark eyes sparkling mirthfully.

"It shows, however," continued her brother, in a graver tone, "that your knowledge of Herbert's character must be a marvellously circumscribed one; otherwise you would scarcely dream of giving him credit for any such tendencies."

"I appeal to you, uncle," said Lucy, assuming an injured air; "are we not fully justified in judging of people by their actions?"

"In most cases, yes," replied the Colonel, leaning comfortably back in a capacious arm-chair, "though it would be hardly fair to apply the same test to every one, as there are some cases wherein circumstances conspire to render it expedient for them to appear as it were *incog.*"

"I can't understand that kind of reasoning," laughed Lucy. "It seems to me very inconclusive."

"Supposing we allow the matter to stand over *ad referendum*," returned her uncle, rising to his feet at the sound of the dinner bell, and offering an arm to each of the young ladies.

"A very good suggestion," said Lady Stanley, leading the way to the dinning-room with Herbert; "you must not mind Lucy's raillery," she went on, addressing the young man in a half-whisper.

"She affects to be very indignant with you for absenting yourself from our house for such a time, and will not, I fear, cease to banter you on the subject."

"Is it quite impossible for me to convince her and yourself that duty, not inclination, was the cause of my absence?" replied Herbert, in the same confidential tone; "had I merely consulted the latter, or discovered a way of reconciling the two, my visits would have been far more frequent."

"Well, I am bound to believe you," answered the lady, with a thoughtful glance at his agitated countenance; "I know from experience that pleasure and duty are not always compatible."

"Then, may I hope that you at least will acquit me of rudeness and ingratitude?"

"I never blamed you, even in thought," said Lady Stanley, quickly,

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED.

"Ask what is human life—the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good—
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair." COWPER.

"Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own." COWPER.

ON entering the drawing-room that evening, after taking a long and interesting pedestrian excursion with Albert, and making acquaintances in some of the fishermen's huts, Herbert started back in the greatest amazement.

The colour instantaneously flushed over his face, and as instantaneously retired, leaving it several shades paler than it was before.

His eye gave one quick pleasurable flash, his heart one throb of wild, tumultuous joy—*then* the gleam of gladness died away, a shadow, so slight as to be scarcely perceptible clouded his brow; he pressed his lips firmly together, and resuming his usual calm deportment went forward.

He had not advanced more than a step or two when he was met by Lady Stanley.

"I am delighted indeed to find you here," she said, cordially extending her hand, and regarding him with one of her tender motherly glances.

"Judging from Mr. Seymour's appearance, mamma, your feelings are not reciprocated," exclaimed the piquant Lucy, coming up to them, and smilingly offering her own hand.

"How easily people are deceived!" thought Herbert, as, having replied to their civilities, he went through the same form with Ella.

In *her* case it really seemed a *mere* form, for he spoke to her without even venturing a glance at her fair face, radiant with youth and beauty, and then turned abruptly away, and replied to the greetings of Colonel Lansmore.

"I have neither forgotten you, nor your wonderful musical skill," said that gentleman, after presenting Herbert to his wife, a tall gaily dressed and somewhat sharp-visaged lady of about forty.

Herbert bowed.

"Now, uncle, I must beg of you that you will refrain from offering Mr. Seymour any compliments," remarked Lucy, in a tone of mock seriousness; "since last you met him, he has, I regret to inform you, greatly deteriorated."

"My dear Lucy," observed Lady Stanley, reprovingly, "you surely do not know what you are saying."

The manufacturer smilingly assented. He appeared in an unusually pleasant frame of mind that evening.

"I suppose I need scarcely ask you whether you care for music?" continued the Colonel, pausing for an instant outside the door.

Mr. Snapson's reply was so indeterminate that it might have been either construed into a negative or affirmative.

"Albert is passionately fond of it," remarked Sir Edward.

"He is," said Mr. Snapson, with a face of profound gratification; "though his delicate health has hitherto prevented him from cultivating the talent I am told he possesses to the same extent as he would otherwise have done."

"In his case I should think very little cultivation necessary; he seems to have such a wonderful faculty of accurately striking off at first sight the exact tune he requires."

Mr. Snapson looked surprised and somewhat puzzled.

"Unfortunately, however," he answered, in a tone which betrayed his unwillingness to make the admission, "he does not play."

"Not play!" exclaimed the Colonel, pointing to Albert, who was at that very moment seated at a magnificent grand piano, which occupied a recess at the upper end of the room, apparently as much in his element as he had ever been in his life; "what is that but playing?"

Mr. Snapson was struck dumb with astonishment, and as he gazed perplexedly around him, unable to realize the truth of that which his eyes and ears were telling him, the expression of doubt and amaze which appeared on his countenance partially enlightened Sir Edward as to the cause of his unwonted bewilderment.

"I suspect this is Herbert's doing," said the baronet, in a low voice.

"Then I am for ever obliged to him," was Mr. Snapson's energetic response; and going hastily forward, he stationed himself near the instrument, and listened to his son's performance with undisguised admiration and delight.

It was rather a curious sight to behold this man, for whose practical and methodical nature the sweetest harmonies had formerly possessed no charm, suddenly becoming alive to the influence of music.

A strange spell seemed over him. He stood rooted to the spot—absorbed, enchanted, fascinated! His eyes softened and grew bright with new-born emotion, his thin lips parted into something closely resembling an unconscious smile, and his whole aspect underwent a complete transformation.

He neither moved nor spoke until Albert, having finished the piece he was playing, rose from his seat, and began to talk with Ella Stanley.

"How is it that I never heard you play before?" inquired the proud father, going up to them, and accosting his son with an indulgent smile.

"Oh, it sounds far better on the organ," replied the lad, in his careless, off-hand tone; "and as we haven't one at home, I generally use Mr. Seymour's."

Mr. Snapson bit his lip, and a slight frown wrinkled his forehead at this unnecessary communicativeness.

"But you must have been aware," he said, in accents of gentle reproach, "that if you had expressed the faintest desire for an organ, I should instantly have purchased one for you."

and with a gentle pressure of his arm; "on the contrary, I admire your firmness and courage, in being able to resist the importunities of your friends, when you feel it would be unwise of you to give way to their solicitations."

"A sure sign," reflected Herbert, "that she guesses at my unfortunate attachment, and wishes to express her approbation of the course I have adopted."

He was confirmed in this opininon when, towards the close of the evening, he accidentally learnt that *his* presence at Penruthven had occasioned Lady Stanley and her daughters as much surprise as himself felt at *their* unexpected appearance.

In vain, however, he tried to prevail on Sir Edward to release him from his promise, by allowing him to shorten his visit. The latter declared he would not on any consideration consent to its being curtailed even by a single day; and, after a brief resistance, Herbert was obliged to submit to his friend's wishes.

I am not sure whether, with all his studied watchfulness and self-control, he succeeded in wholly disguising the state of his feelings from Sir Edward or his more observant mother, though they never gave him the slightest cause to suppose that they suspected him of being in anywise different from what he appeared in the eyes of others.

Nothing worthy of particular note occurred during the first week, which passed away like one of those unspeakably pleasant dreams, upon which we love to ponder in after days—dreams so perfect in their felicity—so unclouded in their brightness—so full of deep, unfathomable joy, of heartfelt content, and complete satisfaction, that while they last we feel as if we had nothing left to wish for—no earthly blessing to desire; and when they fade, as fade they must and do, the sun of our lives seems suddenly to have set, and we find ourselves plunged—for a time at least—into sorrow and gloom.

Mr. Snapson came to reclaim his son on the appointed day.

He appeared to take great interest in the young baronet's affairs, and showed by the numerous questions he put to him regarding the manner in which the estates were entailed—the length of time they had been in the family—and all other particulars which might guide him in entailing his own property upon Albert, and establishing him in a position befiting his wealth and expectations, how much he was prepared to sacrifice for the sake of his idolised son and heir.

Before returning to Lanchester he was induced to remain for a night at Penruthven, where he met with an agreeable surprise.

It so happened that several old friends of Lady Stanley's were spending the evening at the Mount, and, some music being asked for, Lucy and Ella each contributed her share towards entertaining the company.

Mr. Snapson was, in the meantime, conversing with Sir Edward in an adjoining room, upon the subject nearest his heart, whilst Albert, who had become quite a favourite with the ladies, was enjoying himself in his own fashion.

An hour had elapsed ere Mr. Snapson showed any disposition to allow his young host to return to the other guests.

Then they were interrupted by Colonel Lansmore, who came in search of his nephew.

"Will you not step into the drawing-room, Mr. Snapson?" he inquired.

The manufacturer smilingly assented. He appeared in an unusually pleasant frame of mind that evening.

"I suppose I need scarcely ask you whether you care for music?" continued the Colonel, pausing for an instant outside the door.

Mr. Snapson's reply was so indeterminate that it might have been either construed into a negative or affirmative.

"Albert is passionately fond of it," remarked Sir Edward.

"He is," said Mr. Snapson, with a face of profound gratification; "though his delicate health has hitherto prevented him from cultivating the talent I am told he possesses to the same extent as he would otherwise have done."

"In his case I should think very little cultivation necessary; he seems to have such a wonderful faculty of accurately striking off at first sight the exact tune he requires."

Mr. Snapson looked surprised and somewhat puzzled.

"Unfortunately, however," he answered, in a tone which betrayed his unwillingness to make the admission, "he does not play."

"Not play!" exclaimed the Colonel, pointing to Albert, who was at that very moment seated at a magnificent grand piano, which occupied a recess at the upper end of the room, apparently as much in his element as he had ever been in his life; "what is that but playing?"

Mr. Snapson was struck dumb with astonishment, and as he gazed perplexedly around him, unable to realize the truth of that which his eyes and ears were telling him, the expression of doubt and amaze which appeared on his countenance partially enlightened Sir Edward as to the cause of his unwonted bewilderment.

"I suspect this is Herbert's doing," said the baronet, in a low voice.

"Then I am for ever obliged to him," was Mr. Snapson's energetic response; and going hastily forward, he stationed himself near the instrument, and listened to his son's performance with undisguised admiration and delight.

It was rather a curious sight to behold this man, for whose practical and methodical nature the sweetest harmonies had formerly possessed no charm, suddenly becoming alive to the influence of music.

A strange spell seemed over him. He stood rooted to the spot—absorbed, enchanted, fascinated! His eyes softened and grew bright with new-born emotion, his thin lips parted into something closely resembling an unconscious smile, and his whole aspect underwent a complete transformation.

He neither moved nor spoke until Albert, having finished the piece he was playing, rose from his seat, and began to talk with Ella Stanley.

"How is it that I never heard you play before?" inquired the proud father, going up to them, and accosting his son with an indulgent smile.

"Oh, it sounds far better on the organ," replied the lad, in his careless, off-hand tone; "and as we haven't one at home, I generally use Mr. Seymour's."

Mr. Snapson bit his lip, and a slight frown wrinkled his forehead at this unnecessary communicativeness.

"But you must have been aware," he said, in accents of gentle reproach, "that if you had expressed the faintest desire for an organ, I should instantly have purchased one for you."

"Of course you would," answered the lad, in a matter-of-fact voice, "but I wanted to surprise you and mamma by playing a duet one evening with Arabella—which I am not quite perfect in yet. He," —indicating Herbert by a glance over his shoulder—"begged me to keep my secret until after he was gone, and if it hadn't been for Miss Stanley,—slipping his hand into Ella's, and looking archly up into her face—"I should have refused to play to-night; but when he heard that *she* wished it, he could hold out no longer."

"I feel extremely grateful to Miss Stanley for being the means of affording me an opportunity of thanking Mr. Seymour for all the trouble he must have taken with you," said the man of wealth, bowing, and fixing his eyes so keenly and attentively upon her, that she felt her colour rise considerably under his scrutiny, and was obliged to turn away her head, lest he should discover how much she was discomposed by Albert's simple words, as well as his own inquisitive inspection of her glowing countenance.

It did not lessen her confusion when Herbert approached them with a message from Lady Stanley.

To Mr. Snapson's surprise, he appeared as much embarrassed as herself, merely delivering it without a word of comment; and instead of offering her his arm, or showing the least disposition to accompany her as she crossed the wide room in obedience to her mother's summons, he stepped back in order to make way for another gentleman, who had been for some time hovering near, waiting for an opportunity of addressing her, and allowed him to carry her off in triumph.

At first, Mr. Snapson was inclined to suspect Herbert of indifference, but a second glance undeceived him—the settled gravity of his thoughtful countenance, the sad, wistful expression of his large dark eyes, as he gazed after her much-loved form, the close pressure of his finely curved lips, and the painful contraction of his full wide brow, giving undoubted evidence of another and totally opposite feeling.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

RELATIVE VALUE OF £20,000.

"There's something in a noble boy,
A brave, free-hearted, careless one,
With his unchecked, unbidden joy,
His dread of books and love of fun,
And in his clear and ready smile,
Unshaded by a thought of guile,
And unrepressed by sadness,—
Which brings me to my childhood back,
As if I trod its very track,
And felt its very gladness." WILLIS.

"I BEGIN to understand it now," mused Mr. Snapson, with a confident movement of his head. "The poor fellow is attached to her —that's certain; but, being straitened in his circumstances, he thinks he has no chance of obtaining her, and prefers going abroad to running the risk of a refusal. Well! I am sorry for him; but it can't be helped, I suppose."

Having arrived at this conclusion, he would, under ordinary circumstances, have dismissed the subject from his mind; but the gratifying discovery he had just made regarding his son's proficiency in an accomplishment of which he had deemed him comparatively ignorant, and the consciousness that the knowledge thus acquired was solely owing to Herbert's kind and disinterested instructions, had produced such a softening impression upon him, by awakening all the latent tenderness and benignity of his rough and untractable nature, that he felt his sympathies irresistibly drawn towards one who had in so many instances voluntarily undertaken the most difficult and arduous tasks, and quietly and unostentatiously performed the most important services without a thought or hope of reward.

Under the influences of this gentle mood, Mr. Snapson began almost unconsciously to review our hero's magnanimous conduct with respect to his own workpeople. He recollected the demoralised state of the neighbourhood when first he went to reside in it—the roughness and uncivilisation that generally prevailed among the inhabitants; the younger part of the population priding themselves upon their rudeness and pert incivility, both in word and deed, to their superiors; the elders showing, by their uniformly sullen and disrespectful bearing, that they were possessed of a spirit of incipient rebellion, such as only wanted a favourable opportunity to break forth into open insubordination. Now there was a thorough and radical change. You might walk from one end to the other of the village of Colton, and even the adjacent hamlets, and meet nothing which could offend the eye or grate on the most refined ear. There was no profane swearing now—no open scoffing at religion—no exciting of each other's minds to evil; for the men had learnt from that Book

CHAPTER LXXX.

MR. SNAPSON IS AGREEABLY SURPRISED.

"Ask what is human life—the sage replies,
With disappointment lowering in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good—
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair." COWPER.

"Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak
Who trusted in his own." COWPER.

ON entering the drawing-room that evening, after taking a long and interesting pedestrian excursion with Albert, and making acquaintances in some of the fishermen's huts, Herbert started back in the greatest amazement.

The colour instantaneously flushed over his face, and as instantaneously retired, leaving it several shades paler than it was before.

His eye gave one quick pleasurable flash, his heart one throb of wild, tumultuous joy—*then* the gleam of gladness died away, a shadow, so slight as to be scarcely perceptible clouded his brow; he pressed his lips firmly together, and resuming his usual calm deportment went forward.

He had not advanced more than a step or two when he was met by Lady Stanley.

"I am delighted indeed to find you here," she said, cordially extending her hand, and regarding him with one of her tender motherly glances.

"Judging from Mr. Seymour's appearance, mamma, your feelings are not reciprocated," exclaimed the piquant Lucy, coming up to them, and smilingly offering her own hand.

"How easily people are deceived!" thought Herbert, as, having replied to their civilities, he went through the same form with Ella.

In *her* case it really seemed a *mere* form, for he spoke to her without even venturing a glance at her fair face, radiant with youth and beauty, and then turned abruptly away, and replied to the greetings of Colonel Lansmore.

"I have neither forgotten you, nor your wonderful musical skill," said that gentleman, after presenting Herbert to his wife, a tall gaily dressed and somewhat sharp-visaged lady of about forty.

Herbert bowed.

"Now, uncle, I must beg of you that you will refrain from offering Mr. Seymour any compliments," remarked Lucy, in a tone of mock seriousness; "since last you met him, he has, I regret to inform you, greatly deteriorated."

"My dear Lucy," observed Lady Stanley, reprovingly, "you surely do not know what you are saying."

"Pray don't interrupt her," said Herbert, with a smile (he always felt safe with Lucy, and was rather amused at her badinage). "I have no doubt it is perfectly true in more ways than one."

"Ah! you think that by thus candidly acknowledging your errors I shall be induced to withdraw my accusation," returned Lucy, playfully shaking her finger at him; "but I cannot let you escape so easily."

"What is the nature of your charge, my dear?" inquired the Colonel, with a little twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"To tell you the truth, uncle, he has grown dreadfully reserved and unsociable; I will not say morose." This was added with an arch, meaning glance at Herbert. "I only hope it may not end in his being caught in the meshes of cynicism and misanthropy, but I greatly fear——"

A mysterious pursing of the lips finished the sentence.

"Now, Lucy, this is positively disgraceful," exclaimed Sir Edward, with considerable warmth; "I no longer wonder at the tongue being called the 'woman's sword.' Whatever others may do, I can testify that *you* never suffer it to rust."

"I should hope not indeed," laughed the gay-hearted girl, her dark eyes sparkling mirthfully.

"It shows, however," continued her brother, in a graver tone, "that your knowledge of Herbert's character must be a marvellously circumscribed one; otherwise you would scarcely dream of giving him credit for any such tendencies."

"I appeal to you, uncle," said Lucy, assuming an injured air; "are we not fully justified in judging of people by their actions?"

"In most cases, yes," replied the Colonel, leaning comfortably back in a capacious arm-chair, "though it would be hardly fair to apply the same test to every one, as there are some cases wherein circumstances conspire to render it expedient for them to appear as it were *incog.*"

"I can't understand that kind of reasoning," laughed Lucy. "It seems to me very inconclusive."

"Supposing we allow the matter to stand over *ad referendum*," returned her uncle, rising to his feet at the sound of the dinner bell, and offering an arm to each of the young ladies.

"A very good suggestion," said Lady Stanley, leading the way to the dinning-room with Herbert; "you must not mind Lucy's raillery," she went on, addressing the young man in a half-whisper.

"She affects to be very indignant with you for absenting yourself from our house for such a time, and will not, I fear, cease to banter you on the subject."

"Is it quite impossible for me to convince her and yourself that duty, not inclination, was the cause of my absence?" replied Herbert, in the same confidential tone; "had I merely consulted the latter, or discovered a way of reconciling the two, my visits would have been far more frequent."

"Well, I am bound to believe you," answered the lady, with a thoughtful glance at his agitated countenance; "I know from experience that pleasure and duty are not always compatible."

"Then, may I hope that you at least will acquit me of rudeness and ingratitude?"

"I never blamed you, even in thought," said Lady Stanley, quickly,

tive tone. "I positively must insist on your leaving *me* to manage these business affairs," he proceeded, in a kinder voice (though he still looked seriously discomposed, and showed by his manner that he was not to be trifled with); "it is absolutely necessary that you should, before your twenty-first birthday, be removed from all your present associations, and take your standing in a totally different sphere, though it can scarcely be expected that you should, at your age, be fully alive to the importance of——"

He was going on in this strain, when his quick eye descried Lady Stanley approaching them, and as he had no wish to acquaint her with the nature of their conversation, he stopped suddenly, and glancing uneasily at Albert, who looked the very picture of vexation, indignation, and disappointment, whispered hurriedly in his ear,—

"There, don't torment yourself, my boy."

"But it's cruel of you," faltered the lad, struggling with internal emotion; "after his kindness to me, too."

"Well, never mind," resumed his father, in the same low, soothing tone; "I dare say I shall be able to find out some way of helping him."

"Will you try?" questioned Albert, eagerly lifting his eyes to Mr. Snapson's face.

The latter, unable to resist so eloquent an appeal, nodded assent, and then turned to converse with their hostess.

He had no opportunity of fulfilling his promise that night; but the following morning, soon after breakfast, he called Herbert aside, and asked him whether he would accompany him for a short stroll on the sands.

"I have only about three-quarters of an hour to spare," he added, hastily glancing at his watch; "but I should much like to have a little private conversation with you before I start."

Herbert bowed, and, taking up his hat, professed himself to be at Mr. Snapson's service.

Not a word was uttered on either side until they had crossed the pleasure-grounds, and descended to the shore by the narrow tortuous footpath I have already alluded to.

Then the silence was broken by Mr. Snapson.

"There is something very grand in this," he said, drawing a long breath of admiration as he paused beside a low ridge of rock, and pointed to the wide-stretching ocean; even *his* unimpressible mind was not proof against the music of its rolling billows.

Herbert answered not. With his eyes fixed upon the broad waste of waters, over whose agitated bosom the glorious morning sun was pouring its golden rays, he was mentally repeating Dr. Bonar's beautiful and appropriate poem (mentioned by a well-known author as "one of the finest poems ever written"), a portion of which I subjoin:—

"Summer Ocean, idly washing
This grey rock on which I lean;
Summer Ocean, broadly flashing
With thy hues of gold and green;
Gently swelling, wildly dashing
O'er yon island-studded scene:

Summer Ocean, how I'll miss thee,—
Miss the thunder of thy roar,
Miss the music of thy ripple,
Miss thy sorrow-soothing shore!
Summer Ocean, how I'll miss thee
When 'the sea shall be no more!'
Summer Ocean, how I'll miss thee
As along thy strand I range,
Or as here I sit and watch thee
In thy moods of endless change—
Mirthful moods of morning gladness,
Musing moods of sunset sadness—
When the dying winds caress thee,
And the sinking sunbeams kiss thee,
And the crimson cloudlets press thee,
And all nature seems to bless thee:
Summer Ocean, how I'll miss thee,—
Miss the wonders of thy shore,
Miss the magic of thy grandeur,
When 'the sea shall be no more!'
And yet, sometimes in my musings,
When I think of what shall be
In the day of earth's new glory,
Still I seem to roam by thee—
As if all had not departed,
But the glory lingered still;
As if that which made thee lovely
Had remained unchangeable.

* * * *

Backward edding, wave and ripple
Wondrous scenes shall then disclose;
And, like earth's, the wastes of ocean
Then shall blossom as the rose."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

FALSE PRETENCES.

"Alas! what poor ability's in me
To do him good?
Assay the power you have."
Measure for Measure.

"I must not quarrel with the will
Of highest dispensation, which herein
Happy had ends above my reach to know." MILTON.

"Yet 'tis a weary task to school the heart,
Ere years of griefs have tamed its fiery spirit,
Into that still and passive fortitude
Which is but learned from suffering." HEMANS.

"No clamour from the crowd
Can move him, erring, from the path of right."
W. G. SIMMS.

"BUT it was of yourself, not the sea, that I wished to speak," continued Mr. Snapson, heaving an involuntary sigh.

"Indeed," said Herbert, coming out of his reverie, and regarding his companion in visible surprise.

"May I tell you just what I think, without any fear of giving you offence?" asked the latter, a little hesitatingly, as he noted his astonishment.

"Certainly," replied Herbert, more and more perplexed; "why should you not?"

"Advice, when voluntarily offered, is often very thanklessly received," returned the manufacturer, with a smile.

"*Often*," said Herbert, giving back an answering smile, "but not always."

"Well, in this case you will, I trust, at least acquit me of officious interference in your affairs, if I venture to express my unbiassed opinion regarding the step you are about to take."

"I am sure whatever you might say would be kindly meant," observed Herbert in rather a tremulous tone; "but perhaps——"

"It seems to me," exclaimed Mr. Snapson abruptly interrupting his unfinished remark, "that by clinging so tenaciously to this Utopian African scheme, and rejecting the good fortune which Providence has put in your way, you are acting very rashly, not to say foolishly."

"To what good fortune do you allude?" was Herbert's somewhat bitter inquiry.

"Why (it is treading on dangerous ground, I am aware, but there's no use in mincing matters), by forming an alliance with one of Sir Edward's amiable sisters, you might secure to yourself an independency, besides——"

"Excuse me, sir," said Herbert, drawing himself up with a portion of his father's *hauteur;* "I must ask leave to change the subject."

"To tell you the truth," pursued Mr. Snapson, stealing a furtive glance at him, "I should have judged from the expression of your face as you watched all Miss Ella Stanley's movements last night, that I could not have chosen a more interesting topic."

"Or a more painful one," exclaimed Herbert, involuntarily.

"Why painful?" demanded his companion, smiling provokingly; "if you understand each other, that is everything."

A smothered groan was Herbert's only reply; and Mr. Snapson, touched by the look of genuine sadness and dejection which overshadowed his countenance, instantly ceased his bantering tone, and proceeded with grave seriousness,—

"I hope you have no intention of sacrificing your own prospects and the young lady's peace and happiness by a mere punctilio?"

"You seem to be labouring under some strange misconception," said Herbert, nerving himself to speak. "The pure ingenuousness of Miss Stanley's mind, and the refinement and amiability of her disposition, render her peculiarly incapable of treating *any one* with coldness or neglect; but there is, I assure you, no foundation whatever for the supposition that her feelings towards myself are kinder than those she entertains for others."

"Granting that (simply for the sake of argument, *not* because I am convinced), you have no reason to infer that *your* addresses would necessarily prove more distasteful to her than those of your neighbours?"

"No," hesitated Herbert, a deep flush appearing on his pale cheek, as he remembered how entirely free she was from the slightest approach to assumption or ill-bred condescension.

"Why not propose for her, then?" insinuated Mr. Snapson; "even if she should reject you, you would be no worse off than you are at present."

"Propose for her!" echoed Herbert, in a low voice, as if half unconscious that he spoke at all; "I hope I shall be kept from doing that; I should indeed be unworthy of the name of friend if I could thus abuse Sir Edward's confidence, disappoint Lady Stanley's reasonable expectations, and, above all, wound the gentle spirit of her daughter by revealing my own hidden grief, and forcing her, as it were, to add to it by refusing to listen to a suit which must in every way be unsuccessful."

"You appear to take a very morbid view of the case," said Mr. Snapson, rather sarcastically; "need I remind you that in your position most young men would be only too glad to avail themselves of such a chance?"

"I don't doubt it," replied the young man, in a voice which, notwithstanding his efforts at self-control, shook with emotion.

"And yet," remorselessly pursued his companion, "although it is evident from the warmth with which you eulogise the young lady's character, that you consider her everything that is excellent and exalted, and worthy of your lasting admiration and most devoted affection, you can calmly and deliberately relinquish——"

"This is really beyond endurance," cried Herbert, who looked at that moment anything but calm; "I am sorry to leave you so abruptly," he added, turning and facing his tormentor, "but I do not

feel myself called upon to discuss so delicate a matter, and will, therefore, wish you good-bye."

"Stop a moment," exclaimed Mr. Snapson, a grim smile stealing to his lips, as our hero was striding off; "if you will answer me one more question, I will cease to trouble you."

"On any other subject I shall be most happy to converse," said Herbert, standing still, "but——"

"Just tell me frankly," returned Mr. Snapson, going up to him, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, "whether it is the fact of your being yourself in comparatively narrow circumstances, which prevents you from doing what I suggest. Would you, if you were still your father's acknowledged heir" (indirectly Mr. Snapson had discovered the young man's former position), "propose for Miss Ella Stanley?"

The sudden flash of joy which illuminated Herbert's expressive countenance—albeit it lasted only for an instant—was a sufficient answer, and Mr. Snapson, without waiting for words, continued,—

"Now to the point. If you will say the word, I can put you in the way of obeying the dictates of your heart, without in anywise compromising your own dignity, or taking any step against which your pride might naturally revolt."

"I am quite at a loss to comprehend your meaning," observed Herbert, fixing his eyes attentively upon the manufacturer's face.

"Do you not perceive that if you happen to be the possessor of a much larger capital than you can at present command, you might with confidence aspire to the young lady's hand?"

"In a certain sense, yes; but——"

"Well, my object in requesting this interview was to tell you that I am willing to invest you with a considerable sum of money, on the understanding——"

"Pardon me," interposed Herbert, gently, yet decisively; "I have no wish to promote my own interests by any such false pretences."

"False pretences!" repeated Mr. Snapson, in indignant surprise; "if you will take the trouble to listen to what I was about to say, you will see that it is nothing of the kind."

And then he began gradually to unfold his plan. He had previously taken measures to ascertain the extent of Ella Stanley's fortune, otherwise he would scarcely have ventured to advance so large a sum as that which he agreed to put aside for Herbert's use; although, to do him justice, he was really prepared to risk a great deal for the sake of one who had shown kindness to his son, and the security he required was such as many would have rejected as being totally valueless.

Nevertheless, when everything had been explained, our hero still remained steadfast in his first opinion.

He felt that, plausible though Mr. Snapson's reasonings were, and the offer he made such as few young men situated as he was could have resisted, yet it would not be possible to follow his counsel without being guilty of a certain amount of dissimulation and deceit in dealing with his kind and unsuspecting friends.

Mr. Snapson stared at him with open-eyed incredulity, when, after expressing his thanks for the friendly interest he took in his welfare, he proceeded with all gentleness and courtesy to decline his proffered assistance. It was some time before he—Mr. Snapson—could realize

this fact, or be persuaded that Herbert was truly in earnest. It seemed too absurd, he thought, that a person of his limited means should refuse help so generously offered; and when at length he could no longer doubt the sincerity of Herbert's decision, he mentally apostrophised him as the most scrupulous and fastidious individual he had ever met with.

"I wish I could induce you to reconsider your determination," was Mr. Snapson's half-regretful, half-entreating farewell remark.

"Believe me, I am not insensible of your kindness, notwithstanding my inability to take advantage of it," replied Herbert, with stifled emotion. And, turning hastily away, he devoted himself to the somewhat difficult task of comforting Albert, who was inconsolable at the thought of the approaching separation.

After their departure, Herbert tried to recover his own composure, which the late interview with Mr. Snapson had greatly shaken, by a long and solitary walk upon the shore. In returning he chose the road, making a *détour* when about a mile from the house, in order that he might visit a sick fisherman who inhabited a rude hut on the outskirts of the straggling village of Penruthven.

A sudden turn in the road revealed to him the graceful figure of Lucy Stanley, seated on a mossy bank some forty yards off, with her sketch-book open before her, and her eyes riveted with artist-like admiration upon the surrounding landscape.

There being no reason why he should seek to avoid her society, Herbert quickened his pace, and was soon at her side.

"All alone, Miss Stanley?" he said, accosting her in as cheerful a tone as he could assume.

"Have you seen Edward?" she demanded, her face instantly lighting up with animation.

"No, I thought——"

"Mamma sent him in search of you nearly an hour ago, as she was afraid you might forget your engagement."

"My engagement?" echoed the young man, looking thoughtful.

"Don't you know that we are going to a sort of *fête champêtre* at Lady Lexley's?"

A slight cloud came over Herbert's countenance. Lady Lexley was the mother of the gentleman who had been so eager to claim Ella's notice the preceding evening, and whose sentiments towards her could not for a moment be misunderstood.

"Now, no excuses!" cried Lucy, watching him with a face of playful malice; "go you must! So it is quite useless for you to be meditating an escape."

"Useless, indeed," returned Herbert, smothering a sigh, "if you persist in adopting that peremptory tone."

"The fact is," continued the wilful girl, in a tone of mock seriousness, though the laughing sparkle of her eyes showed that she only wanted to tease him, "it is necessary for my own peace of mind that you should accompany us."

"How can that be?" inquired Herbert, who was too full of his other and more weighty disquietudes to detect her object.

"You would not, I am sure, wish to see me neglected?" she observed with affected gravity.

"I scarcely imagine there is much danger of that," said Herbert, unable to keep back a smile at the suggestion.

"Quite a mistake, I assure you," with a portentous shake of her head. "Humiliating as such a confession is, I must tell you that unless you are very polite and attentive to me for the rest of the day, I shall probably find myself treated with the greatest disrespect; for Mr. Lexley is coming for us, you know, and *he* of course will devote himself to Ella. *En passant*, I may observe he is a most uninteresting companion; at least, *I* find him so."

"Perhaps your sister has discovered some excellences in his character which have escaped your penetration," remarked Herbert, in a low, tremulous tone.

"Perhaps so," rejoined the merry girl, fixing her bright sportive eye full upon him. "At all events, *he* is infatuated with her, and wherever she goes, poor child, he follows her like a shadow."

"Is this the only reason you have for demanding my presence?" said Herbert, forcing himself to carry on the conversation.

"No. I was going to explain that Edward must take care of mamma, and my uncle will have enough to do to look after his wife, so that I should be quite *de trop* without you."

"You forget that when once you arrive at Lady Lexley's you will meet numbers of visitors who——"

"All strangers," interrupted Lucy, scornfully shrugging her shoulders, "and I hate strangers—the generality of strangers, I mean, who entertain you with stupid nothings, and stale compliments, and senseless jokes."

"You should be thankful that there are some bright exceptions," returned the young man, falling in with her humour.

"Yes, I actually fancied *you* were an exception when first we met; but then you could hardly be called a stranger."

"You soon discovered your error," replied Herbert, smiling at the remembrance of sundry lectures he had since received from her respecting what she was pleased to term his "puritanical religiosity."

"Well, if you were a little less strait-laced," began Lucy, in her old half-laughing, half-expostulating tone. "But it must be later than I thought," she exclaimed, abruptly closing her sketch-book, and rising to her feet, as she caught sight of her brother coming up the hill with Mr. Lexley. "I do wish Ella would make haste;" and she threw an impatient glance around her: "she ought to have been here before this."

"Will you excuse me for a moment?" said Herbert, who had not heard her last remark; "there is a sick man in this cottage," pointing to the fisherman's hut, which was close at hand, "for whom I should like to inquire."

"Oh, certainly," answered Lucy, with alacrity, and her look plainly showed him that she more than suspected him of wishing to avoid the gentlemen just then. "I will join Edward and Mr. Lexley, and you can follow us at your leisure. If you should happen to see anything of Ella," she added, in a careless tone, "you will, of course, bring her home as soon as possible."

Thus saying, she hurried away, and persuaded Sir Edward and Mr. Lexley (much against the latter's inclination) to accompany her to the house, instead of waiting for her sister, as they at first proposed doing.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE FETE CHAMPETRE.

"Tells how each beauty of her mind and face
Was brightened by some sweet, peculiar grace;
Tells how her manners, by the world refined,
Left all that taint of modish vice behind,
And made each charm of polished courts agree
With candid truth's simplicity
And uncorrupted innocence." LYTTLETON.

"Whose kindly melting heart,
To every want, to every woe,—
To guilt itself, when in distress,—
The balm of pity would impart,
And all relief that bounty can bestow."

MEANWHILE, Herbert, having reached the half-opened door of the roughly constructed hut, was about to enter, when a voice vibrated on his astonished ear, the tones of which, sweet, low, and musical, could, he knew well, only belong to one person, and that one the being for whom he would be content to pour out his heart's blood, if he could by so doing add in the smallest degree to her present or future happiness.

He paused with his foot upon the threshold, charmed and fascinated by the vision of loveliness and beauty which had thus unexpectedly burst upon him.

It was in truth a striking picture on which he gazed.

The small, low-browed, and meanly furnished cabin, with its blackened walls and dingy rafters, formed a sort of dusky background, out of which appeared in bold relief two figures—the one that of a bent and aged man, who sat in an arm-chair, propped up with pillows, his wasted features showing that disease had placed its ruthless fingers upon his enervated frame, and death already marked him for its prey—the other, a fair and radiantly beautiful girl, on whom the sun, as it struggled in through the narrow latticed window, rested lovingly, now describing a fairy-like circle around her exquisitely graceful form—now lighting up her sweet young face with indescribable lustre and brilliancy—now encircling her as with a glorious diadem, gliding caressingly over her softly flowing ringlets, which lay like burnished gold upon her snowy neck, and anon glancing forward to leave a beam of luminous brightness upon the little gilt-clasped book she held in her hand, from which she was reading to her attentive auditor, of the storm on the Lake of Galilee, and Jesus walking on the sea.

While Herbert stood hesitating and irresolute—himself completely screened from observation by the partially closed door—Ella's voice ceased. She had finished the chapter, and after silently shutting her Bible, and taking up her hat and gloves, she approached the old

man's chair, and began tenderly to arrange his pillows. When she had made him comfortable, she bent over him, and said a few words in too low a tone for Herbert to hear, to which the fisherman heartily responded in the Cornish dialect,—

"Yes, tez clain wonderful; I alwus kneow that God was great, for I've seen many of His wonders on the deep; but somehow I've been thinking moor of His *goodness* lately than ivver I did before; and I beant so much afeerd now of death, though it caent be far off."

"And yet it is an awful thing to die, Ambrose," said Ella; and there was an expression of wistful solicitude in her eyes, as she bent them upon the sick man's face, which Herbert could not fail to notice.

"True, for you, miss; and many a desmal night have I kept awake askein myself, as I listened to the waves rumbling upon the shore, how it 'ud be wi' me if I were called suddenly to meet my Judge. But," after a momentary pause, during which his aged features worked convulsively, "I doen't feel so bad now; somethun tells me that He who saved poor Peter when he was drowning will lend a helping hand to an ignorant old fisherman like me, when He sees me battling waeth th' waves of t'other dangerous ocean, and prevent me from bein' landed in th' wrong place."

Ella looked at him a little anxiously, as if she found it somewhat difficult to determine whether he had sufficient grounds for cherishing this hope.

Presently she said, in a voice which trembled with earnestness,—

"If I take down that large Bible," pointing to a high shelf on which reposed a few books, a few curious shells, and stray bits of coral, "and put it upon this table by your side, will you—— But how forgetful I am!" she added, in a disappointed tone; "you cannot read."

"No, I caent read," replied the aged sufferer, with a mournful shake of his head. "Those books," turning admiringly towards the shelf, "belonged to my old missus, who was a wonderful reader—she died more nor twenty years since, but I doent like to paert with them."

"Will you let me come and see you again to-morrow?" asked the young girl, glancing hastily at a tall old clock—another relic of his departed wife—which stood amidst a heap of fishing-nets in the farthest corner of the miserable hut.

"Will I let you?" said Ambrose, reverently stroking the fair white hand which she unhesitatingly placed in his own bronzed palm; "shuar I hardly know th' old place when you're in it; you make it look so bright and cheery; and you comfort my old heart, too! Yesterday, when you went away, I felt as if everything seemed darker and more desmal than it 'ud ivver been before."

"I wish you could see Mr. Seymour," said Ella, in a slow, hesitating tone; "he would know so much better than myself how to help you. I think I must ask Edward about it," she continued, speaking more to herself than her companion.

"Tez likely I *hev* seen him," responded the old man eagerly, "ef he's tall, and handsome, with dark hair and eyes——"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Ella in unfeigned gladness; "has he been here?"

"Aw, well, he *hes* been here, an' he put up a prayer for me, which, I'm boun' to say, made me weep like an infant. He promised to call again; perhaps he'll come to-day."

Herbert knew nothing of the surprised, involuntary start which followed this announcement, or the sudden flushing of Ella's cheek, or the nervous haste with which she made her escape from the cottage, in order that he might, on his arrival, find the field vacated. Directly his own name came upon the tapis, he had gently stolen away, and was now seated with his back to the cabin, upon the very spot where he had found Lucy. His heart was full to overflowing—pleasure and pain being so strangely mingled that he could hardly have told which feeling predominated.

Nevertheless he heard Ella's light footfall as she approached him; and springing instantly to his feet, he prepared to address her with as much tranquillity as he could on the spur of the moment command

"I thought I should have found Lucy here," she said, the flush on her cheek growing deeper as she perceived him.

"She returned to the house a short time ago with Edward and Mr. Lexley," replied Herbert, holding out his hand for a fancy basket which was hanging on her arm;—she had brought some delicacies for the sick man in it, and was now carrying it home empty.

The two walked on for a few steps in silence; then Ella stopped, saying, with an air of palpable embarrassment,—

"I fear I am taking you out of your way; if so, I can easily——"

"Would you refuse me the pleasure of accompanying you home?" said Herbert, trying to speak lightly.

"No," she answered, with ingenuous frankness; "I should be glad, only——"

"Only you have grave doubts whether you could not get on better without me than with me?" interposed Herbert, suggestively.

"You know I never had such a thought," rejoined Ella, beginning to feel less constraint and embarrassment on seeing him in, as she supposed, excellent spirits. She had often unconsciously noticed with how much more familiarity he treated Lucy than herself; and if she had possessed an exacting disposition, she might have taken offence at the difference, little guessing that it was the loving and respectful admiration he entertained for her that prevented him from maintaining towards *her* the same easy footing which came natural to him in his intercourse with the merry and piquant Lucy.

When they had exchanged a few unimportant sentences, Ella asked somewhat hesitatingly,—

"Had you been waiting long for me?"

Herbert, unable to resist a sudden impulse, turned and looked at her, and for a second their eyes met. Her timid, half-abashed, half-questioning gaze almost unmanned him; but, conscious of his error, he smothered his emotion in a sigh of unutterable sadness, as he answered, in a low, museful tone,—

"No; not long."

"Did Lucy tell you where I was?" she continued, eyeing him apprehensively. Her suspicions were evidently aroused by the strangeness of his conduct, though happily for her peace of mind she had not the faintest conception of its cause.

Herbert could, with a clear conscience, answer the question in the negative; but it afterwards occurred to him that, as Lucy would be sure to seize the first opportunity of rallying them upon their unexpected *rencontre*, and perhaps unintentionally wound Ella's sensitive-

ness by her ill-timed pleasantry, it would be better for him to tell the truth, so that she might be in some measure prepared for her sister's playful and highly coloured deductions. He therefore added, in a gentle, deprecating tone,—

"Will you be very angry with me if I confess that I found that out for myself?"

"How?" queried Ella, below her breath.

"I was in the act of stepping inside old Ambrose's cottage when I recognised your voice, and rather than disturb you I decided on putting off *my* visit until to-morrow."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Ella, whose heightened colour and the slight shadow of disappointment that gathered over her fair young brow testified that she was in earnest; "so very sorry!"

"May I ask why?" returned Herbert, a half-smile parting his lips; "for my own part, I was very glad."

"Glad!" repeated Ella, looking doubtfully up at him.

"Yes, glad to find you so well and profitably engaged," he explained, in low, earnest tones; "glad to feel that you derive not only satisfaction, but *pleasure*, in ministering to the temporal and spiritual necessities of our poorer and less enlightened neighbours."

"You do me far more than justice," murmured Ella, with averted eyes; "I am so lamentably ignorant myself, that I can do little good to others."

"It is when we are thus persuaded of our ignorance and incapacity for doing any good work, that we begin to gain true wisdom," said Herbert, encouragingly. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

"*I* am not humble," was the modest disclaimer, accompanied by a grave and very conclusive shake of the head.

Herbert's eyes expressed a different opinion, but he could not trust himself to continue the subject, and their conversation during the rest of the walk was of a more general, though scarcely less interesting nature.

"Well, here you are at last!" cried Lucy, hastening to meet them directly they entered the house. "The carriages are at the door, and we are all ready to start."

"Perhaps I had better go as I am, then," said Ella, looking dubiously down upon her neat summer costume; "it will be better than keeping you——"

"Go as you are!" echoed Lucy, lifting her hands and eyes in pure amazement. "You foolish child!"

"There's plenty of time, my love," said Lady Stanley, coming out of the drawing-room on hearing their voices; "you will find Leeson upstairs ready to assist you in dressing—but you need not hurry," she added, as Ella ran off to make the necessary alterations in her toilet; "we should never dream of going without *you*."

In less than a quarter of an hour the young girl returned and joined the others on the terrace.

The two sisters formed a pretty contrast. Both so lovely, and yet so dissimilar in appearance, manner, and character.

Ella with her fairy, sylph-like form, her soft, liquid eyes, her delicate rose-tinted cheeks, and golden rippling hair, suffered not a whit from comparison with the brilliant brunette complexion, raven tresses, large, dark, sparkling eyes, and queenly figure of

her elder sister, although the latter's *distingué* and slightly imperious air was never perhaps seen to greater advantage than when viewed in conjunction with Ella's gentle and retiring disposition.

Their dresses were alike, with this exception, that while Lucy's flowing robe of silver-grey crape was tastefully decorated with flutings of pink satin, Ella's was simply and lightly trimmed with narrow bands of blue. Their ornaments also differed in one respect, inasmuch as Lucy's brooch, necklet, and bracelets, were composed of pink amethysts—Ella's of turquoise stones; and the same distinction might have been observed in the long white feathers which drooped so gracefully over their dainty little hats, one being tipped with pink, the other with blue.

A single glance was all that Herbert allowed himself to take of Ella, as she made her appearance.

Apparently Mr. Lexley's admiration was less easily restrained; for his gaze was so ardent and prolonged that the colour mounted to her very forehead, and she turned away from him almost with a frown.

Nothing daunted, however, the young man persevered in his attentions, escorted her to the carriage with as much complacency as if he were already her accepted lover, and, seating himself beside her, devoted his conversation exclusively to her until they reached the Gothic cottage which served as lodge to his father's villa.

Here they all alighted, and made their way through newly mown walks and terraces to a bread plateau of green sward, where their hostess was receiving her guests under the canopy of a Turkish tent.

"You see I was right," sagely remarked Lucy to Herbert, as Mr. Lexley, after accompanying them to his mother's presence, hurried Ella off—evidently against her inclination—to a distant part of the grounds; "he has neither eyes nor ears for any one else when *she* is by."

"It would be strange if he had," murmured Herbert, quite unconsciously.

"Upon my word, you are very complimentary," exclaimed the disdainful beauty, affecting to be mightily offended; "is this your gratitude for all the disinterested exertions I have been making in your behalf?"

"Pardon me, I am far from understanding you," faltered Herbert, colouring with vexation at having thus unwittingly betrayed himself.

"Did I not connive at your enjoying a *tête-à-tête* walk with a certain young lady?" she demanded, in her usual tone of lively *persiflage*, her eyes meanwhile sparkling with playful malice; "and did I not voluntarily charge myself with the ungracious task of amusing a certain unamusable gentleman, merely for the sake of pleasing and gratifying you?"

"Must I be responsible for your free-will actions?" asked Herbert, recovering his wonted calmness of manner. "I was no party to——"

"Nevertheless, you fell in with my designs naturally enough," mockingly interposed Lucy.

"I had no alternative," was Herbert's quiet response, as he paused at the foot of one of the artificial embankments, and offered his hand to assist her to descend.

" Really you are too provoking," replied Lucy, in a half-petulant, half-amused tone; " there's no such thing as managing you; I may as well give up the attempt, I think."

" Pray do," said Herbert, smiling pleasantly; " you will find me a *mauvais sujet*."

" An obstinate one, at all events," muttered Lucy, *sotto voce;* " and not gifted with any great amount of perspicacity."

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH.

"Oh! why has worth so short a date,
While villains ripen gray with time?
Must thou, the noble, generous, great,
Fall in bold manhood's hardy prime?" BURNS.

"Alike the feeble and the brave
Must cry, 'We perish!'—Father, hear, and save!
Wilt Thou forsake us, 'midst the stormy wave?
We sink, we perish!—Father, hear, and save!" HEMANS.

"We are as near heaven by sea as by land."
SIR HUMPHREY GILBERT.

ON the day which succeeded Lady Lexley's *fête* Herbert paid his promised visit to the old fisherman; after which he indulged himself in one of those long solitary rambles he so much enjoyed, where he could almost forget his own multiplied sorrow, while

"Climbing the green hill's side
With healthful life-pulse and elastic limb,
And gazing round him on the prospect wide,
Ascribe its varying beauties all to Him
Who framed the earth, and girt the azure tide,
Who fathers all that creep, or soar, or swim,
Whose model and whose handmaid, Nature, smiles
'Mid arctic icebergs, as in tropic isles!"

and feel, while thus considering, the perfection of harmony revealed to him by the incomparable work of creation, that he was surrounded by an unseen presence, and could hold, through nature, communion with nature's God.

The afternoon was advancing when he at length set out on his return. His walk had taken him some distance inland, but on nearing the mount he diverged, and after crossing several fields, found himself upon the cliff.

Here the road was very beautiful, and Herbert often stopped to look around him and drink in the exhilarating sea breezes, and listen to the breaking waves as they dashed against the rocky shore below.

"This must be an unusually high tide," thought he, as his eye sought in vain for certain large masses of blackened rock which he had not previously seen covered.

Before he could do more than make this mental observation his attention was attracted by a group of fishermen, who seemed to be cautiously leaning over the precipitous cliff at a little distance from the spot where he stood.

With a feeling of alarm, for which he could not have accounted, Herbert came quickly up to them, and inquired, in his grave, kindly tones,—

"Is anything the matter, my friends?"

The men stepped back a few paces on hearing his voice, and looked at each other without speaking.

Again Herbert repeated his question, and again the men regarded him with a dubious, uncertain look, as if loth to communicate the cause of their disquietude.

At last one of them said,—

"Well, sir, tez the young lady."

"What young lady?" cried Herbert, grasping the nearest man by the shoulder, and gazing at him with a face from which every particle of colour has fled.

"Doent take on, sir," replied the man, in a tone of rough sympathy, as he tried to escape from his gripe; "we may be mistaken 'bout it, you know."

"What do you suspect?" asked Herbert, addressing himself to one, who seemed from his dress to belong to a higher grade in the strata of society than that of a poor fisherman—he was, in fact, a respectable wholesale tradesman who had come to Penruthven for the purpose of negotiating with these simple-minded children of the sea for a regular supply of its produce for the Exeter market.

"Well, sir," he answered, trying to be as concise as possible, "it appears that this young lady—Miss Stanley I believe she is called?" appealing to the others, who, as if to add to the insupportable load of anguish which was already weighing down Herbert's heart, briefly responded,—

"Yes—the youngest."

"Was seen passing through the village on her way to the sands more than an hour ago," continued the sympathising tradesman, "and," he paused for an instant appalled by the expression of Herbert's face, then went on in a low, hurried tone, "and nothing has been heard of her since."

"And have you taken no steps?" indignantly cried Herbert, turning to the hardy fishermen with flashing eyes and quivering nostrils.

"What could we do?" demanded one of them, somewhat sullenly; "afore *we* knew aught of th' matter the tide 'ud made it impossible to go by the reg'lar path——"

"And equally impossible for *her* to return by it," said Herbert, in the tone of a man who had begun to bring every faculty of the mind to bear upon some life or death question.

"There is still one chance left," said the first speaker.

"You mean the private footpath leading into Sir Edward's own garden?" quickly interposed Herbert.

The man assented.

"We'll soon see 'bout that," exclaimed another of the men, who had been looking eagerly in the direction of the mount, "for here comes th' messenger we sent to inquire at th' house."

As he spoke, a well-grown boy approached them, panting and out of breath.

The dismal shake of his head prepared them for the intelligence he brought. Ella had not yet returned home, and the servants were in a great fright about her—Sir Edward and Colonel Lansmore being out driving with the other ladies, quite unconscious of the threatened danger.

Quick as lightning Herbert considered the case in all its bearings. He had not a doubt that Ella was still on the sands; and if so,

she must, he felt sure, be very near the spot where they were now standing, though the noise of the waves had prevented her from hearing or replying to the warning shouts of the fishermen.

It was useless attempting to save her by the public road; for, in addition to its being nearly a mile and a half distant, he was assured by those who must be acquainted with the nature of the tides far better than himself that the sands in that quarter were in many places already impassable.

Of course a similar objection might be urged with respect to the private footpath, as it lay the *same* way, the only difference consisting of its being about half a mile nearer.

"It would be a sheer waste of time going that way, with scarcely a chance of finding it practicable," mused Herbert, and, casting one despairing yet wistful glance in the direction of the mount, he saw, to his dismay, that several of the projecting points were entirely covered.

"Can you tell me of no other path?" he asked, hoarsely, of his more experienced companions. "I care not how steep or inaccessible it may be;" and advancing still nearer to the precipitous cliff, he gazed down its dark sides with an expression of such firmness and indomitable resolution that the worthy tradesman, fancying he would in another moment fling himself headlong over its dangerous declivity, took the precaution of dragging him forcibly back, exclaiming as he did so,—

"You must be mad, sir, to think of exposing yourself like that."

Herbert's next words served rather to confirm him in his opinion.

"Will one of you hasten to Ambrose's cottage" (which was within a stone's throw), "and ask him to lend me the strong rope he was showing me this morning?"

"Is he going to hang hisself, father?" ejaculated the boy, in an awe-stricken whisper, as he noted with what earnestness Herbert was examining the large trunk of an old tree, which stood like some beacon, bare, leafless, and branchless, a few yards from the extreme edge of the cliff.

"Hush! foolish lad," replied his father, who seemed to have no difficulty in comprehending our hero's intentions; for, muttering between his closed teeth, "If I don't interfere, it'll be worse nor hanging," he went close up to him and began to expostulate.

His remonstrances, however, fell upon deaf ears, and the very next instant he might have been seen hastening off towards Ambrose's cabin, albeit the expression of his countenance, and the half-pitying, half-dissentient shake of his head, as he moved away, showed that, although he thus went to satisfy Herbert, he did so under protest.

While he was gone, our hero briefly explained to the others what he wished them to do.

The men listened to him with opened-eyed amazement, and when he had concluded they consulted each other's weather-beaten faces before committing themselves to an act of which they might hereafter have cause to repent.

"You must be tired of life, sir," said the cautious landsman, breaking the silence, "or you would never propose such a wild and dangerous feat as that."

"It's clain presumption," rejoined a middle-aged fisherman; "norry one of *us* w'd try *that* cliff; and how can you expect to manage it?"

"You'll be dashed to pieces, sir," was the conclusive summing up of another.

"And then w'd feel in a certain sense murderers," added a third.

To these objections Herbert answered not a word. I doubt whether he heard them. He was standing *outwardly* fixed and motionless as a statue, awaiting the return of the man with the rope.

Presently he came, and while Herbert was assisting him to adjust it round the tree the trader took the others aside, and conversed with them for a few seconds, in a low, earnest tone.

Then they again approached Herbert, and the former said, with graver emphasis,—

"I suppose you are aware, sir, that though you might by a miracle descend in safety, it would be certain death were you to attempt to ascend in a similar way?"

"I know it," said Herbert, shortly.

"Then what, may I ask, will be your fate if you should succeed in gaining the sands?"

"About two miles hence," pointing in an opposite direction from Penruthven, "there is a narrow passage up the cliff. Perhaps some of you will repair thither, in order to assist me in helping the lady to ascend, in case we are able to reach it."

A quiver passed over his fine features as he uttered these last painfully suggestive words, which was not unnoticed by the tradesman, who, probably mistaking its cause, urged bluntly,—

"And if you are *not* able to reach it? (and a thousand to one whether you succeed in doing so), if you discover on finding the young lady that it is quite impossible to save her—what then, sir?"

"I can at least die," was the curt reply.

And seeing him thus bent on carrying out his design, they no longer sought to place obstacles in his way.

Only once, when everything had been arranged, and the rope which was to bear his weight secured around his waist, the kind-hearted landsman inquired before giving the signal for lowering him,—

"Will you not listen to reason?"

The answer he received was the softly murmured sentence,—

"*Deo adjuvante, non timendum*," which (not knowing that Herbert was merely repeating for his own encouragement the motto of the Seymour family) puzzled the good man exceedingly.

It would not be easy to describe the sensations of our hero when he found himself suspended in mid-air.

The chief danger to be apprehended was, that he might sustain some mortal injuries by being dashed against the sharp sides of the rocky precipice. Owing, however, partly to his own agility and skill, in avoiding the most dangerous places, and partly to the united exertions of those above, he escaped with only a few bruises.

His first act was to send up a grateful acknowledgment to the great Preserver of men, for His merciful deliverance. He then waved his hat at the humble promoters of his success, and went on his way, all unconscious of their dolesome lamentations that one so young and brave should thus voluntarily engage to furnish the hungry sea with another victim.

"Well, we did our best to dissuade him from making the rash attempt," said the tradesman, moving away from the edge of the cliff, "and now he must abide the consequences of his folly."

"Shuar tez a great pity," soliloquised the man who brought the rope, "I'd nivver have thought he'd really go and do it."

"Nor I," echoed the others; "I alwus fancied he'd give in at the last moment."

"At any rate we may as well go to the house, and let them know what is going on," suggested the matter-of-fact fishmonger; "and then there will be no harm, I suppose, in proceeding to the place he spoke of."

"'Twill be useless," said the best informed of the fishermen, who had been perched upon the top of the old tree, anxiously watching the spread of the tide; "before they can possibly reach *that* spot they will be locked in."

And descending from his post of observation, he walked off, ominously shaking his head, and mumuring, apparently more for his own information than that of any one else,—

"I know the coast better than most people, I expect; and not for five hundred pounds"—an enormous sum, be it remembered, to him —"would I undertake to walk from the Scars Head in the face of the tide."

For some time Herbert could see nothing of Ella Stanley, but on rounding a huge boulder he suddenly beheld the flutter of her light dress. She was coming leisurely towards him, now and then stooping to pick up specimens of shells or seaweed, or pausing to watch the bright flashes of golden light which played upon the rugged coast, or listen to the plaintful tones of the silver-winged seabirds, gracefully skimming over the ocean's unquiet bosom.

When she recognised Herbert, she began to quicken her pace, concluding that he had been sent to look for her by Lady Stanley, who was probably growing uneasy at her being out so long alone; but directly he got within hearing, the young man beckoned to her to remain where she was; and increasing—if, indeed, that were possible —his own speed, he quickly came up to her.

"Why are you in such haste?" she asked, with a smile. "But, oh! something is wrong," she added, on meeting his eyes fixed upon her with an expression of the keenest anxiety and distress; "you are ill; and, oh! your hands are all covered with blood! What is it? —do tell me!"

"Don't be alarmed," replied Herbert, in a tone of inexpressible tenderness; "but I must beg you to come with me in this direction, as it is a spring tide, and the sands on the other side are impassable."

And taking one of her trembling hands in his own bruised and bleeding one, he gently urged her on.

"Did you come to tell me this?" said Ella, her soft eyes filling with grateful tears, as she bravely strove to keep up with him.

A silent pressure of the hand he held was Herbert's only answer.

"And are you sure that the sands on this side are not also covered?" she asked, presently, in a hoarse whisper.

"We shall soon see," replied Herbert, who was straining his eye to discover how far the margin of sand extended, and wondering (with what intensity of feeling we may well conceive) whether they would be able to pass the next headland.

"Are you very tired?" he said, pausing for an instant as they neared it, and gazing down upon her with the deepest pitifulness.

"No—oh, no," she breathed; but look!"

And she pointed to the eddying waters, which were fast gathering around the point.

"My poor child, you must let me carry you over these slippery rocks."

And scarcely waiting for her permission he took her in his arms as if she had been indeed a child, and bore her in safety to the other side.

"Now set me down," she whispered.

"Presently," he answered, hurrying onward with the utmost rapidity; "there is still another headland to be passed; if we can round *it*, we shall be saved."

"Can't you see it?" murmured Ella.

"Not yet; but directly we get clear of these rocks—ah! there it is!"

The voice ceased.

And Ella knew, without being told, that they were too late.

Still Herbert pressed on, hoping, yet despairing; determined, on the one hand, to use every effort to preserve the life of the sweet girl who clung so confidingly to him, and trusted him so implicitly; and painfully conscious, on the other, of his utter helplessness and inability to do aught towards averting the ruthless fate which seemed to be awaiting them both.

Amid all his haste, however, he eagerly scanned every inch of cliff they passed, in case he might haply discover some ledge of rock on which they could await the retiring of the tide, or some mode of ascent, however tortuous, by which he could hope to bear his precious charge to a place of safety.

Vain scrutiny!

Up rose the jagged rocks in perpendicular masses, as if to mock the futile attempts of mortals to scale their frowning sides, and his heart sank within him as he saw, only too plainly, that their last chance of escape was cut off.

Between the two headlands was a bay, terminating in a sort of cavern, called Scars Cave, and on arriving there they found themselves, as the fisherman had predicted, locked in.

After gently placing Ella, whose blanched, terrified face showed how much she suffered, upon a large stone just inside the cave, Herbert went to take a careful inspection of every part of the coast. Then he examined the dark cavern, and having penetrated into each nook and cranny, he finally returned in despair to Ella.

"Is there no hope?" she inquired, lifting her white scared countenance to the tall figure silently keeping watch at her side.

"Alas! none!" he answered, in a voice which she could scarcely recognise as belonging to him, so mournful and utterly hopeless was its tone.

The poor girl shuddered as he continued,—

"In less than an hour this cave will be full of water!"

And then, overcome by the rushing crowd of miserable and conflicting passions which could no longer be repressed, Herbert sank upon the ground at her feet, and, covering his face with his lacerated hands, he groaned aloud in very bitterness of spirit.

"O Mr. Seymour, I am so sorry for you," said Ella, instantly rallying her own latent strength on perceiving him thus suddenly deprived, as it were, of hope and courage; "it is only right that I should suffer, as it was entirely *my* fault; but I can't bear the

thought of sacrificing *you*. Could you not save yourself?" she added, laying her hand with trembling earnestness upon his shoulder, as the thought flashed across her that this might be possible; "perhaps you could swim round the point—do try!"

"Save myself!" cried Herbert, swiftly raising his head, and regarding her with a glance of unutterable affection. "O my darling! my darling! have I indeed disguised the state of my feelings so well? Do you not know that I love you better than anything on earth, and that for your sweet sake I would be content to lay down a thousand lives if I possessed them? O Ella! Ella! if I grieve now, it is because I cannot die *for* you, instead of with you!"

What a surprised, joyful, wondering look she gave him from out of her soft blue eyes, her face meanwhile glowing and quivering with some deep internal emotion! Everything else was for the moment held in abeyance—even death itself seemed powerless to break the spell which had been thus suddenly cast around her by the confession of this great and mighty love!

"As long as there seemed a chance of escape I remained silent on the subject which has for so long a time been occupying my mind and heart," continued Herbert, in a low, impassioned voice; "but there can be no harm in my telling you the truth now—*now* that we shall soon stand face to face with death. May I speak, dearest Ella?" leaning forward, and endeavouring to obtain a glimpse of her face, which was partly turned away, "may I explain to you how long and ardently I have loved you, and how, at last, despairing of ever conquering my attachment, and feeling that I ought, on your account, to refrain from giving utterance to my sentiments, I resolved on leaving England without again seeing you—shall I tell you this, my darling?"

Ella was too much agitated to speak; but she bent her head in silent acquiescence, and Herbert went on, in a tone which thrilled through her every nerve, to tell her the story of his growing affection for herself, and the vehement, though unsuccessful efforts he had made to subdue and overcome it.

"You know it all now," he said, at length, gazing at her with wistful earnestness, longing, yet scarcely daring to hope that a responsive chord might be awakened within her own breast; "I would not be ungenerous, especially at such an hour as this; but, if you *could* give me one little word of kindness, it would more than repay me for all that I have suffered."

There was no affectation of coyness or reserve about Ella; for, though naturally shy, and timid as a fawn, she was too pure and simple-minded to dream of evasion; and now that she had begun to read her own heart aright, and to find out how dear Herbert was to her, she unhesitatingly gave him the benefit of her discovery.

"Herbert," she replied, lifting her eyes, and revealing a countenance all aglow with the rosy light of love, "*dear* Herbert, I am not worthy of you!" And, gently stealing her hands into his, she murmured, softly, "if not on earth, yet in heaven."

The solemnity of the action impressed him with the deepest reverence; and, gathering her to his breast, he imprinted fond kisses upon her crimson cheeks, exclaiming, in a tone of infinite pathos,—

"My own, my own! is it possible that you could have returned my love?"

"*Possible!* Ah, yes!" she replied, a smile of exquisite softness and beauty playing around her lips, as she laid her lovely face against his shoulder with a gesture of such unutterable affection, and child-like innocence, and confiding trust, that Herbert was touched to his very soul.

"Thank God!" he fervently ejaculated, clasping her still closer in his arms, "this is indeed happiness! May the Lord bless and reward your unbounded goodness."

* * * * * *

"O Herbert! must we die?" said Ella, recalled at length to a sense of their danger by hearing the furious waters dashing upon the rocks not far from the entrance of the cave.

Blame her not, kind reader, that she recoiled from the prospect of death—and what a death! She was young, and strong, and wondrously happy; and to *such*, life is passing sweet.

"Must we really die?" she repeated, looking up at him with a wild, wistful, despairing expression.

"Let us pray, my darling," returned Herbert, in a low, quivering voice—it was almost more than he could endure to see her thus suffering.

And kneeling down upon the yellow sand, he threw his arm around her trembling form, and prayed, oh! how earnestly! that they might both be resigned to God's holy will; have faith to meet the approaching enemy without alarm, and find themselves, as earth and earth's objects receded from their sight, safely received into the harbour of rest—the celestial paradise, where all is bright, and pure, and fair—*joy* unshadowed by a single pang of sorrow; *meetings* undarkened by the prospect of partings; and *life* eternal as its Author—death being swallowed up in victory.

After this, Herbert devoted himself to the task of comforting and encouraging Ella, by repeating such words as these,—

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee."

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

"Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

"Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

"*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*"

Meanwhile the rolling billows came each moment nearer and nearer, until they approached the mouth of the cave.

Cruel, cruel sea!

The sight of the first wave which made its stealthy entrance inside the cavern sent a thrill of terror through the poor girl's frame; and, giving utterance to a low, moaning cry of anguish, she fell back rigid and insensible in Herbert's arms.

She had fainted!

CHAPTER LXXXV.

THE TURN OF TIDE.

"To die for what we love!
Ah! there is strength in the true heart for this;
It is to live without the vanished light
That strength is needed."

"For death itself I did not fear; 'tis love that makes the pain.
Love feareth death. I was no child—I was betrothed that day;
I wore a troth-kiss on my lips I could not give away."

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

"His voice commands the tempest forth,
And stills the stormy wave;
And though His arm be strong to smite,
'Tis also strong to save." *Scotch Paraphrase.*

"BETTER so," thought Herbert, as he gazed mournfully down upon Ella's fair young face, half hidden by its clustering golden curls: "every moment she remains thus will be a merciful respite."

And gently bearing her to the farthest extremity of the cavern, out of the immediate reach of the incursive tide, he laid her down upon a bed of dried seaweed, and took another minute inspection of the interior of their prison-house. Having previously examined every corner—groped about him on all sides, in the faint hope of discovering some way by which they might escape the impendent danger, some narrow shelf or aperture in the rough rock which might afford them a temporary place of refuge—he would under other and less appalling circumstances, have considered any additional investigation wholly superfluous; but situated as he now was, with death staring him in the face, and every moment threatening to put an end not only to his own existence, but that of one dearer than himself, he proceeded with sharpened senses and intensified eagerness to institute another and yet closer search.

The roof of the dusky cavern being composed of uneven jaggy rocks, many of them coming a yard or so down from the ceiling, to within about six feet of the ground in different places, the space between them was not easily distinguished from the darkness of the cave, especially towards its inner end. Herbert for a time scanned this roof without observing anything to fix attention; but as his eyes grew more and more accustomed to the gloom, he could discern it, even in its darkest parts, except in one corner, which remained obscure, and required further examination.

By rolling a large stone, which, fortunately for his purpose, lay near, immediately under it, and collecting pieces of loose rock, pebbles, and sand, he made a standing-place sufficiently elevated to enable him to clamber into a chasm between rocks, which he could not at first discover, owing to the great obscurity.

His joy may easily be imagined at finding, on further exploration,

that there was a cleft, wide enough to admit more than one person. Still a desperate doubt remained as to how high the spring tide might rise. He, however, lost not an instant in coming down from the only place which offered a chance of safety, and hastily communicated the good tidings to Ella, who had in the interim recovered from her fainting fit, but was still reclining, motionless and dejected, in the spot he had left her.

With his assistance she rose, and soon reached the little platform of stones and sand he had erected. It was not, of course, without much difficulty and delay that Herbert was able, standing upon such infirm materials, to succeeded in raising her up to the height required for entering the darksome friendly fissure.

Never did so fair a creature take refuge in a less inviting place. Nevertheless her feelings on gaining it were those of unmitigated delight; for, as Herbert did not deem it advisable to explain to her how uncertain and precarious their situation still was, she concluded that they were in effect already saved—saved as by a miracle from a slow and dreadful death; that she would ere long be restored to her affectionate friends and most happy home; that the only cloud which threatened to embitter her future prospects was removed. The wise, the good, the excellent, the noble being, to whom her idolised brother owed his life, was no longer proud and distant, shunning her society, and treating every one else with more apparent kindness and courtesy than herself; but *she*, so unworthy, so ignorant, so timid, so useless (this was her meek estimation of a character which others read somewhat differently), *she* was now the *confidante* of the innermost feelings of his heart, the object of his tenderest love, for whose sake he had been prepared to sacrifice the happiness of a lifetime, to say nothing of the double risks he had that day incurred upon the bare and improbable possibility of being able to rescue her from a watery grave.

While these thoughts rapidly passed through Ella's mind, Herbert effected his own entrance into the sheltering chasm.

He was not a moment too soon; for scarcely were his feet lifted off the heap he had so laboriously amassed (his only implement being the blade of an oar), when it was overwhelmed by the advancing tide.

A half-articulated cry of joy came to the young man's lips at this signal and hair-breadth escape, and it was echoed by Ella, whose ear had detected the sound of the gurgling waters just as she felt her hand grasped by Herbert, and knew that he was safe.

"O Herbert!" she whispered, convulsively returning the pressure of his hand, "was it not fortunate that you discovered this?"

"It was indeed, my darling," he replied, drawing her as far away from the narrow opening as the circumscribed limits of the place permitted, "most providential! Thank God, His ears are ever open to His children's cry."

"Shall we have to remain here long?" inquired Ella, after a pause of several minutes.

"You are feeling ill, dearest," anxiously exclaimed Herbert, fancying he noticed a change in her voice.

"No, not ill," said Ella, drawing a lengthened inspiration, like one who has suddenly awakened from some terrible dream; "only tired."

"My poor child!" And bringing her closer to himself, he made her rest her head against his shoulder, while he tried to render her position as comfortable as was under the circumstances possible.

"You don't mind the darkness!" he asked presently, in his grave, kind, protecting tones.

"Not with you," she murmured, without moving her head.

"Would you like me to sing a hymn?" was his next question.

"Oh, yes," replied Ella, in a more animated manner; "do try Edward's favourite, 'Abide with me—fast falls the eventide.'"

"A very appropriate one," returned the young man, endeavouring to steady his voice before commencing it.

When he had finished the fifth verse,—

> "I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless,
> Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
> Where is death's sting? Where, grave, Thy victory?
> I triumph still, if Thou abide with me."

He paused, and Ella remarked, in a low, musing tone,—

"I'm afraid I forgot that, or I should not have been so frightened at the thought of being drowned."

> "'But timorous mortals start and shrink
> To cross this narrow sea,
> And linger shivering on the brink,
> And fear to launch away,'"

said Herbert, softly. "Yours is no exceptional case, my darling; we are all more or less inclined to look upon death with repugnance; we all need to pray—

> "'Reveal Thyself before my closing eyes!
> Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies,'

before we can triumphantly repeat the next line,—

> "'Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee!
> In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!'"

"I am so ashamed of my faint-heartedness," continued Ella, in a self-accusatory tone; "or, rather, my grievous want of faith."

"Want of strength, I should call it," replied Herbert, soothingly. "Your *faith* never really wavered, your confidence in Christ was not for a moment shaken."

"No, oh, no!" she answered fervently; "only—only I was terrified."

"Even the disciples feared as they entered into the cloud," said Herbert, thoughtfully, "and yet they were blessed with the near and visible companionship of their Divine Master."

And thus he gently soothed her with softly breathed words of comfort and encouragement and loving counsel, which dropped like refreshing dew upon her meek spirit, dispelling her fears, strengthening and invigorating her faith, comfirming her love, and animating her with renewed hope and courage.

And all this time the waters were rising and raging below.

Often and often did Herbert cast an earnest, wistful gaze into the darksome cavern (*light*, however, when compared with their present place of security), and often and often did his heart sink within him as he noted the gradual swell of the tide.

"A few feet farther, and we are lost!" mused he at last, with an unconscious sigh. And, closing his aching eyes, he did not again

repeat his survey for some minutes. Then it seemed to him (or was it merely the wish which formed the thought?) that no change had occurred during this short interval.

Once more he averted his eyes, and silently waited for what appeared to his vivid imagination to be several hours, though his reason told him that it could be only so many minutes.

Oh, joy, joy! when next he looked, there *was* a change—slight, it is true, but perceptible. The tide had turned, and they were saved!

Of course, a very considerable time must necessarily elapse ere the cavern would be sufficiently free from its encroaching flood to enable them to descend from their close and confined prison-house; yet Herbert's relief was so intense, his gratitude to that Being who had so miraculously guarded and preserved them in the midst of such great peril so fervent, and his happiness at the prospect of restoring his beloved Ella to her despairing friends so perfect and complete, that he could at first think of nothing else.

Although he had scrupulously refrained from letting Ella know the full extent of their imminent peril, he could not help giving utterance to some of the joyful feelings which stirred his heart when he found that all danger was happily over.

"And have you been kept in suspense until now?" she asked, in mingled surprise and alarm. "Oh, why did you not let me know?"

"You have suffered enough already, my poor darling," was Herbert's tenderly affectionate answer.

"And you!" she whispered, "what must *you* have suffered!—and all for my sake! Ah, Herbert," she added, with a sudden and irrepressible outburst of grateful emotion, "I have not deserved such devoted kindness. I am so *very* unlike you."

"Unlike me!" repeated Herbert, trying to speak lightly; "I should hope so indeed! I should be sorry for my precious little wife to be simply a ditto of myself!"

For a moment his conscience smote him for adopting such a tone towards her—but only for a moment. He felt that although nothing short of the bitterness of beholding Ella about, as he supposed, to perish before his eyes, could have wrung from him the avowal of his sentiments; yet, having once declared them, and being assured in return of her affection for himself, it was his duty, no less than his privilege, to urge his suit in a more regular form, and try, if possible, to prevail upon Lady Stanley to give her consent to their engagement.

The sun had long since set when at length they left the cave, and the moon's silvery radiance shone over the rippling water, as they traversed the sands on their way home.

Instead of extending their route by crossing the headland, and climbing the steep and in many places dangerous paths which led to the top of the cliff on the other side, where he had requested the fishermen to meet him, Herbert preferred returning by the same road they had come.

He was grieved to see how pale and exhausted poor Ella looked, and greatly feared that what she had that afternoon undergone might result in some serious illness.

He would not suffer her to walk, but himself carried her every step, until they had ascended the intricate little footpath which brought them within sight of the house. They had scarcely time to observe the signs of confusion and commotion which pervaded the

dwelling ere they were met by one of the servants, who, upon seeing them, uttered an exclamation of the greatest affright; *then*, lifting her hands with a gesture of incredulity, wonder, and delight, she rushed past them, and fled like a lapwing into the house, the doors of which stood wide open, and breathlessly communicated the welcome tidings to those within.

Lady Stanley and Lucy, the only occupants of the drawing-room, the gentlemen having gone down to the beach with a party of fishermen, could not at first realize the good news. Nevertheless they hurried out, and when the former saw that it was indeed true, her white sorrow-stricken countenance became instantly lighted up with joy, and as she folded her recovered treasure in her arms, she whispered, in a voice which showed how deep and overpowering was her emotion,—

"My precious, precious child; thank God that you are safe."

Next she turned to Herbert, and without trusting herself to say another word she hastily seized one of his poor bruised hands in both her own, and before he could prevent her, or divine her intention, she had pressed it to her lips.

"With your permission, dear Lady Stanley, I will carry her upstairs," said our hero, glancing anxiously at Ella, who could scarcely stand, "she is, as you perceive, quite worn out, and needs rest and quiet." And suiting the action to the word, he conveyed her to her own dressing-room, where he laid her down upon a sofa.

"You dear, darling, foolish little thing," cried Lucy, who appeared almost beside herself with joy, "how you did frighten us! I cannot even yet believe that it is really you;" and she kissed her again and again, as if to make sure of her indentity.

"It is all Herbert's doing," said Ella, smiling faintly; "if *he* had not taken care of me, I should have been drowned long ago."

"So it's *Herbert* now!" exclaimed Lucy, who seemed instinctively to comprehend what had occurred; and her dark eyes, whose lids were still red and swollen from the tears she had so recently shed, sparkled mirthfully.

"Yes, now and for ever!" murmured Ella, venturing a soft, shy glance at Herbert, and afterwards nestling her head among the pillows, with the innocent air of a tired child, who can remain awake no longer.

"Here, my love," said Lady Stanley, coming hurriedly into the room with the housekeeper, who bore a salver in her hands, covered with various kinds of nourishing dishes, "you must take something at once."

"Indeed, I can't, mamma," replied Ella, without opening her eyes. "I am sleepy—not hungry."

"But it is absolutely necessary that you should eat first," urged Lady Stanley; "at any rate, you can swallow this, my dear," she added coaxingly, bringing forward a plate of strong soup.

Again Ella shook her head, but when Herbert leant over her, whispering softly, "For my sake, darling," the soft blue eyes unclosed, and flashed up to him a bright grateful look, and she held out her hand for it, saying meekly,—

"I'll try, mamma."

It was evidently an effort for her to comply with their wishes, and several times she was on the point of putting it away untasted, but

those few simple words "For my sake," were too forcible to be withstood—it was the first thing he had ever asked her to do, how then could she refuse?

Herbert quietly stole away to his own apartment as soon as she had finished the soup. He felt the need of being alone, in order that he might think over what had transpired, and endeavour to tranquilise his mind, which was in a perfect whirl.

His cogitations were, however, soon disturbed by a tap at the door, followed by the entrance of the housekeeper, who came with a roll of lint and some ointment, and begged him to allow her to bind up his crushed hands.

He had much difficulty in restraining his impatience as she made this request—it seemed to him at that moment a matter of such supreme indifference, and he told her so.

But his unwelcome visitor was not to be repulsed—examine them she *would* and *did*, and afterwards proceeded, quite against his will, to execute her self-appointed task with sundry ejaculations of grief and concern at the depth and severity of several of the cuts, and ended by expressing her opinion that although her own skill in the healing art was something worthy of particular observation, she could not venture to assert that it would in his case be sufficient without the assistance of a competent surgeon.

"I suppose Miss Ella is asleep?" said Herbert, upon whose inattentive ear her words had *fallen*, it is true, but produced not the slightest effect.

"She is, sir," replied the loquacious housekeeper, going off upon another tack; "and thankful we may be to you for——"

"Did you say that Lady Stanley was asking for me in the dining-room?" inquired Herbert, unhesitatingly interrupting her in the middle of her sentence.

"Yes, sir; she begged me to tell you that she would be very glad if you would go down and get some refreshment. "Ah, sir," added the good woman, with tears in her eyes, returning to her subject, "you don't know what a terrible state we have all been in; we never expected to see either of you alive again; and as for my lady, when she came in from her drive, and found out what had happened, I really thought it would have killed her outright. But, if I may make bold to ask the question, sir, how did you manage to escape?"

Herbert briefly explained.

"'Twas a miracle," she remarked, conclusively, while fastening a black silk handkerchief outside the lint covering of one hand, and then commencing a similar process with the other, "nothing else. Now, sir," she continued, presently, glancing complacently at her handiwork, "I won't detain you longer; I have done all that is necessary for the present."

It must be confessed that Herbert's own sensations as he beheld his hands thus swathed and confined were by no means comfortable. He was keenly averse to anything like ostentation or display, and imagined—foolishly enough, no doubt—that having his members thus bound and bandaged was equivalent to making a boast of his exertions, and the risk and danger he had so lately incurred.

He was still regarding them with a dubious, uncertain look, mentally debating the question, and asking himself whether he could not in some way get rid of these useless encumbrances, with-

out hurting the feelings of his well-meaning friend, when the door was flung violently open, and Sir Edward burst into the room, and seizing him impulsively by the shoulder, he literally fell upon his neck and wept.

"Now you must go downstairs," he said, recovering himself at length; "mamma is in great trouble about you; she says you have tasted nothing since morning—not even a glass of wine—and the dinner is all getting spoilt. Come along, you dear, good, noble fellow." And grasping his arm, he forced him to accompany him to the dining-room.

An hour later, and Herbert was pacing the floor of the library with quick, uneven footsteps, a flushed and agitated countenance, firm-set lips, contracted brow, and eyes, now flashing with uncontrollable rapture, now darkening beneath some bitter and desponding reflection.

He was soon joined by Sir Edward and Lady Stanley, for whom he had sent.

The latter gazed at him with surprise and latent uneasiness.

"I hope you are not going to be ill," she said, in a voice of deep emotion; "but, indeed, after all you have——"

Here Herbert, with very unusual discourtesy, interrupted her with a gesture of impatience; after which he observed, in short, hurried sentences, as if he could hardly get the words out,—

"Pray say no more—I am already satiated with thanks and unmerited praises; and if you will listen to what I am about to tell you, you will probably discover that, so far from being the unselfish and disinterested person you seem to consider me, I——"

He paused for a moment; a shade passed over his brow, his lips quivered with suppressed feeling, and every muscle of his face appeared to be moved by some strange and unwonted influence.

Sir Edward stood mute with astonishment, scarcely daring to believe the evidence of his senses; while Lady Stanley's dignified countenance underwent a sudden change, a look of painful perplexity extinguishing the gentle and affectionate expression it had hitherto worn, and the mild eyes, so recently moist with tender sensibility, now became anxious and terror-stricken.

"It is true," resumed Herbert, "that I put my life in jeopardy—but why? Simply because *her* life was, in my estimation, a thousandfold more precious than my own! because I love her passionately, and with intense devotedness! and—and," he added, in the tone of one who has committed some desperate crime, but is nevertheless determined to make a full confession, "*I have told her so!*"

There was a period of profound silence, during which the tender light came back to Lady Stanley's eyes, and a softly heaved sigh spoke of infinite relief.

Herbert waited, quite expecting to hear himself *not* abused, but gently reproached for taking advantage of such an inappropriate time to avow his love.

How was he amazed, therefore, when the lady, after exchanging an intelligent glance with her son, came forward, and exclaimed, while laying her hand affectionately upon his arm,—

"My dear Herbert, if you have *her* consent, you have mine. There is no one in the whole world to whom I would more cheerfully resign her than yourself."

"What!" cried Herbert, who seemed unable to credit such good news; "tell me, Edward," turning appealingly to the young baronet, "what does she mean?"

"She just means that you are the best and noblest fellow on the face of the earth," was sir Edward's enthusiastic reply, "and that she has for a long time loved you almost, if not quite, as well as she loves me——"

"Stop, Edward!" said Herbert, staggering giddily into a chair; "this unlooked-for happiness is too much for me—I cannot realize it."

"How could you for a moment suppose that we should disapprove of your suit?" asked Sir Edward, after a pause; "I have often wondered at the obtuseness of your perceptions in this respect, and succeeded at last in persuading myself that I was entirely mistaken in fancying you ever cared for Ella."

"Ah!" said Herbert, "know you not that—

> 'There is in love
> A consecrated power, that seems to wake from its repose,
> In the profoundest depths of thinking souls,
> Superior to the outward signs of grief,
> Sighing or tears'?

But apart from this," he went on, mournfully, "I could not forget that I was a disinherited son with very limited means, and she——"

"Has enough for both," quickly interposed Sir Edward. "Surely," he continued, seeing that Herbert was about to speak, "you are not too proud to make use of that which she would under other circumstances, not know how to spend?"

"Too proud!" repeated Herbert, thoughtfully; "I scarcely think it can be called pride."

"I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, it's nothing else," rejoined Sir Edward, warmly; "pride shows itself in a variety of forms, you know; and in your case—— But here comes Lucy; she will soon find a definition for it."

"A definition for what?" demanded the sprightly girl, looking at them with an air of arch meaning.

"Never mind," said her brother, who guessed that Herbert would shrink from pursuing so delicate a subject in her presence; "we will not expose ourselves to your 'sarcastic levity of tongue,' my good sister."

"May I not even offer my felicitations?" inquired Lucy, demurely.

"Have you already discovered that he is in a position to require them?" asked Sir Edward, in surprise.

"Indeed I have," she replied, with a frank, good-humoured laugh; "his manner, to say nothing of Ella's, has undergone such a noticeable transformation that I was at no loss to understand how matters stood with them. And I need hardly say," she added, in a tone of real, heartfelt sincerity, "how much pleasure it gave me to think that the one of all others we most truly value and esteem should be entrusted with dear Ella's happiness."

Herbert's eyes glistened gratefully. His cup of joy seemed full to overflowing, and as he gazed around him upon these dear friends—doubly dear to him as being the relatives of his beloved Ella—he murmured, in a tremulous, half-audible voice,—

"*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?*"

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE LOSS OF THE "BURDWAN."

"Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?"
SHAKESPEARE.

"No common coxcomb must be mentioned here,
Nor the dull train of dancing sparks appear,
Nor fluttering officers who never fight;
Of such a wretched rabble who could write?"
SHEFFIELD, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

"O, but she is wise!
Or else she could not have the wit to do this;—
The wiser the waywarder." SHAKESPEARE.

"There are to whom that ship was dear,
For love and kindred's sake!
When these the voice of rumour hear,
Their inmost heart shall quake,
Shall doubt, and fear, and wish, and grieve,
Believe, and long to unbelieve,
But never cease to ache." JAMES MONTGOMERY.

HERBERT'S fears regarding Ella's health were happily unverified; for when, contrary to his expectations, she appeared at breakfast the following morning, her countenance, though a trifle paler than usual, bore no remaining traces of the hardships and suffering of the preceding day.

She had, Lady Stanley assured him, enjoyed an unbroken night's repose, which doubtless assisted very materially in averting the evil consequences which might otherwise have ensued from so unwonted a degree of fatigue and nervous excitement.

The meal was drawing to an end, when Lucy, who happened to be seated near her mother, remarked, in too low a tone for any one else to hear,—

"Mamma, Mr. Lexley is coming up the avenue."

"Is he?" replied Lady Stanley, with a slight start; and she cast a dubious glance around the table, as if uncertain what course to adopt.

"Don't you think he ought to be told about Ella?" continued Lucy, in the same suppressed tone; "he will never cease persecuting her until he knows how odious his attentions are to her."

"Yes, he *ought* to be informed," said her mother, reluctantly: "but I confess I feel very unequal to this task just at present, and it would be useless requesting Edward to undertake it."

"Let *me* do it, mamma," returned Lucy, eagerly.

"You?" exclaimed Lady Stanley, looking at her in doubt and perplexity; "I fear you might be too abrupt—too flippant, my dear; and this is a case which requires extreme delicacy."

"I promise you I will be as demure and matter-of-fact as yourself," began Lucy.

"No—that would not do either," rejoined Lady Stanley, smiling and shaking her head; "if you do it at all, it must be in your own way. I dare say you would manage it as well as any one," she added, musefully; "and your impromptu and informal mode of conveying the intelligence would be far less likely to wound his feelings."

"Shall I go, then?" asked Lucy, rather impatiently, as a loud peal at the door-bell announced the gentleman's arrival.

"You will treat him with every kindness and consideration," urged the gentle mother, in a tone of assent.

"*En doutez-vous?*" replied the sprightly girl, a curious little smile parting her lips, as, with an assuring nod, she rose from her seat, and, gliding through a door at the upper end of the apartment, sauntered into the spacious drawing-room. She had just taken up a piece of fancy-work, and seated herself at one of the open windows, when Mr. Lexley made his entry. He came in, booted and spurred, and with all the appearance of having ridden hard.

His face looked flushed and preturbed, and there was an indefinable expression about his eyes—a certain blending of relief and annoyance, haughtiness and apprehension, confidence and embarrassment—which Lucy's instinctive penetration soon detected, and for which she had no difficulty in assigning a cause.

Before responding to her civil inquiries after his own and his mother's health, Mr. Lexley cast a hurried glance around the room, as if disappointed at finding her alone.

"I was away yesterday," he said, abruptly, and did not therefore know of your sister's danger until it was happily over; otherwise, I need scarcely say, I should have lost no time in coming to offer my services."

"Thank you," replied Lucy, going industriously on with her work; "I am sure you would have done all you could to help us if you had been here; though the peculiarly unfortunate position in which poor Ella was placed rendered any of the ordinary methods of assistance quite unavailing."

Mr. Lexley bit his lip, and the colour deepened upon his countenance at this mention of the word *ordinary*.

"Was it intended as an insult?" he asked himself, attentively scanning Lucy's face the while, "or was it merely a figure of speech uttered without any particular meaning?"

"I suppose you are referring to the *extraordinary* way in which I have been given to understand Mr. Seymour acted?" he rejoined presently, checking the disposition he felt to grow angry.

"Just so," answered Lucy, with provoking coolness.

"But you surely cannot wish to insinuate that *he* is the only one who is capable of performing a generous action?"

"Oh, by no means," said Lucy, with an air of great candour; "only you must confess, Mr. Lexley, that under the circumstances he was far more likely to succeed than any less interested person."

"Why—what do you mean?" demanded Mr. Lexley, now thoroughly mystified; "'*under the circumstances*,'" he repeated, impatiently, "what circumstances?"

"Dear me, how obtuse you are!" sighed Lucy, in affected amazement; "I really think you might guess. Did it never occur to you that Ella and Mr. Seymour might be attached to each other?"

A smothered imprecation and an involuntary clenching of the hands testified to Mr. Lexley's excitement.

"Are you trifling with me?" he demanded, in a husky voice.

"What a ridiculous question!" exclaimed Lucy, opening her eyes in real or pretended indignation; "why should I trifle with you? what possible reason could I have for deceiving you?"

"You surely must have known, or at least surmised, my intentions towards your sister," he explained, in a low, significant tone.

"Your intentions?" repeated Lucy, gazing inquiringly into his face. "Oh, to be sure," she added, with great simplicity, "you would have saved her if you could, of that I am quite persuaded; and both Ella and Mr. Seymour will, I feel convinced, be very grateful to you for——"

"Excuse me, Miss Stanley, but it is most exasperating to hear you talk like that."

"Is it?" said Lucy, shrugging her shoulders; "I was only attempting to express our united——"

"You knew right well to what I alluded when I spoke of my intentions," pursued the irate gentleman, a look of mingled incredulity and astonishment overspreading his handsome though somewhat haughty countenance; "you must have seen by my actions that I thought of proposing for your sister myself."

"You?" cried Lucy, regarding him with an expression of admirably simulated surprise—"impossible!"

And, unable longer to conceal her amusement, she indulged in a low, musical laugh.

"Have I said anything to excite your mirth?" inquired the mortified suitor, gazing darkly down upon her, and speaking in a tone of proud severity; "to me it seems a serious subject."

"Indeed, you are right," frankly responded Lucy, "and I ought to ask your pardon for my apparent levity; but the fact is, I can never be serious for long together, and I could *not* help laughing at the idea of your proposing for Ella—you are so utterly unlike each other, you know."

"But about Mr. Seymour," said the young man, cooling himself down as far as practicable; "am I to understand that she is engaged to him?"

Lucy's bright eyes sparkled an affirmative.

"I can't believe it," continued Mr. Lexley, in a querimonious tone; "she never hinted to me there was any such engagement."

"It would be singular if she had," observed Lucy, dryly.

"And as for Mr. Seymour himself, so far from viewing him in the light of a rival, I always deem him——"

"Beneath your notice," suggested Lucy, filling up the sentence for him, as he paused in search of an appropriate expression.

"I certainly did not anticipate *this;* and even if I had suspected for his design, I should have felt no apprehension as to its result."

Lucy could with difficulty sustain her gravity, and suppress the humorous reply which came to her lips at these words, pronounced in a tone made up of assurance and chargin.

Remembering her mother's injunction, however, she *did* control herself, and instead of saying what she at first thought, she remarked with an air of confidential and impressive frankness,—

"There is one thing you must not lose sight of, Mr. Lexley—one

extenuating circumstance, which is well calculated to soothe you amidst your present disappointment."

"Perhaps you will have the goodness to inform me in what this extenuating circumstance consists," observed the gentleman, in a tone suggestive of any amount of injured feeling and wounded susceptibilities; "it appears to me that I have little grounds for self-gratulation."

"Is it no relief to you to know that you have been spared the pain and humiliation of being formally rejected?"

"Hum! I can hardly tell," replied Mr. Lexley, reflectingly; "the question is, *should* I have been rejected?"

"Oh, if you are still sceptical on that point, you can easily use measures to ascertain the truth," rejoined Lucy, with an involuntary arching of her eyebrows; "but take my advice, Mr. Lexley, and don't expose yourself to such a mortifying and unnecessary test."

"Are you so certain that Mr. Seymour is the favoured one?"

"Ella has accepted him," explained Lucy, astonished at the question; "isn't that proof positive?"

"In one sense, yes; but you must recollect that she is very young, and though she might upon the impulse of the moment yield her consent to this engagement, yet if I had an opportunity of convincing her of the superior strength and fervour of my own attachment, and——"

O thou vainest and most self-complacent of mortals!" apostrophised Lucy, with an irrepressible efflux of merriment; "will nothing satisfy you that her choice is unalterably fixed?"

"But you, and your brother, and Lady Stanley—are you all content to see her throw herself away upon a mere fortune-hunter?" questioned Mr. Lexley, in a voice which shook with suppressed passion.

"Excuse me," said Lucy, drawing herself haughtily up, while her eyes flashed forth an angry, defiant glance; "*he* is no fortune-hunter. If you were to go through the length and breadth of the land, you would hardly meet his equal; certainly you would not find another who is actuated by less mercenary motives."

Mr. Lexley coloured violently.

"If that is your opinion, I have, of course, no right to interfere," was his constrained answer; "but I hope you will permit me to clear myself from the imputation your words would seem to cast upon *my* motives. *I*, at least, am no needy adventurer——"

"Neither is he," coolly interpolated Lucy.

"The Lexleys being too well known and too much respected," continued the young man, without appearing to notice the interjection, "to suffer in the slightest degree from any comparison——"

"So are the Seymours," was Lucy's next interruptive remark.

"And as regards means——"

"That is a subject I never trouble my head about," cried Lucy, determined to shorten his eulogistic details: "though I should suppose that even in that particular Mr. Seymour would be no undesirable match."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lexley, with something very like a sneer; "do you happen to be acquainted with the amount of his income?"

"No," mused Lucy, resting her chin on her hand, and assuming an attitude of profound reflection; "I really am afraid I cannot tell

just what his *present* income is. Years ago his father was, I know, in the habit of allowing him £1,000 a year as pocket-money; but *that* is no criterion—he was little more than a boy then. *Mr. Seymour*, however (Herbert's father)," she added, fixing her bright eyes on her companion's face, in order to judge of the effect of her communication, "enjoys from £20,000 to £25,000 a year, and it would be strange if he neglected to look after the interest of his only child."

If Herbert had been listening to this flourishing account of his own worldly circumstances, he would have felt quite horrified, and done his very utmost to prevent the wilful, warm-hearted, and mirth-loving girl from trying to mislead Mr. Lexley respecting his real position; but Lucy had none of his scruples. She excused herself by thinking that she had spoken nothing but the truth, which was, no doubt, perfectly correct,—only, by suppressing a very considerable portion of it, she contrived to convey an exactly opposite impression to what was in fact the veritable state of the case.

"Twenty thousand a year!" ejaculated Mr. Lexley, whose respect for Herbert was now increased a hundredfold—one of his foibles consisting, as Lucy well knew, in an overstrained and exaggerated estimate of the indispensability of associating with those who were liberally provided with all the varieties of wealth and its concomitant advantages; "then I must perforce recall the epithet I just now applied to him. I had no idea he was so well off. I fancied, indeed, from his living alone, and being apparently——"

"Oh! that is one of his whims," said Lucy, mysteriously; "for, to let you into a little secret, he is not, with all his excellence, entirely free from certain freaks of fancy! He and Edward are indoctrinated with the same principle, and wherever they have reason to think the people are neglected, and in need of spiritual instruction, *there* they consider they ought forthwith to betake themselves."

"And your sister? Is she——"

"Just like themselves," eagerly asserted Lucy; "she heartily concurs in all their projects, be they ever so wild and extravagant; encourages Edward in the most Utopian of his philanthropic vagaries; and as for Herbert—she simply adores him!"

Mr. Lexley winced. He plainly saw what she aimed at; but he could not as yet discover any ground of comfort in her words.

"But after all," he remarked, making a miserable attempt to smile, "this is no consolation to *me*."

"Oh! don't lose heart," said Lucy, sympathisingly; "try again, Mr. Lexley, and ten to one you will succeed."

"Ah! do you advise me still to persevere in my attentions?" inquired he, entirely mistaking her meaning.

"No, no," answered Lucy, relapsing into her old tone of mirthful badinage, "that would be a waste both of time and labour; but what is to prevent you from bringing your artillery to bear upon some other heart, my dear sir?—some one who is, like myself, unappropriated!"

"Like you!" repeated Mr. Lexley, catching at the last words; "it would be a hopeless task trying to win *you!*—I should shrink from it—you would be too much for me, I fear."

"What, afraid of a woman's tongue!" cried Lucy, laughing and clapping her hands almost with childish glee; "isn't that rather cowardly?"

"Only think what I should have to endure," continued Mr. Lexley, in a tone which showed that he at least was considering the matter from a perfectly serious point of view; "after going through all the perplexing alternations of hope and despair, endeavouring to conquer your indifference towards me, and yet always doubting whether I should succeed—after months of anxiety, and watchful solicitude my sufferings would probably be brought to a climax by finding out that you also were pledged to some more fortunate rival."

"Or, what is far more probable," emphasized Lucy, who had suddenly become grave, "you would discover that I was too pertinaciously fond of my own way, and wedded to my own opinions, and charmed with my present life of freedom and umlimited exemption from control, to consent to exchange them for the caprices and tyrannical exactions of a husband."

"You speak warmly," exclaimed Mr. Lexley, earnestly; "believe me——"

"I know what you would say," interrupted Lucy, in her usual tone of careless vivacity; "there *are* exceptions, no doubt; but," shaking her head conclusively, "I should be sorry to try the experiment. Now, Mr. Lexley," she added, rising from her seat, as she saw that he was about to make some rejoinder, "will you not accompany me into the next room? Mamma and the others will be delighted to see you."

"Thank you," he replied, recoiling a few steps, and regarding her in evident dismay; "that is an ordeal I would much prefer evading."

"Oh, do come," said Lucy, in her half-coaxing, half-peremptory fashion; "you *must* meet them ere long, you know, and may just as well get it over at once."

"But I am in no mood for witnessing happiness which has been purchased at my expense," remonstrated Mr. Lexley, with considerable bitterness; "neither could I go through the farce of expressing congratulations which I do not feel."

"There is no reason why you should," returned Lucy, kindly.

And after a little more persuasion—a sentence or two of good-humoured pleasantry, and cheerful raillery, and playful expostulation—the disappointed chevalier called his pride to his aid, and yielded a reluctant assent.

He found the interview less trying than he had anticipated.

Herbert, who guessed—partly from *his* manner and partly from Lucy's—what had happened, instead of meeting him with an air of lofty exultation, or half-suppressed triumph, came instantly forward and addressed him in a tone of such marked consideration, and cordial, conciliating frankness, that Mr. Lexley was unable to withstand the delicate sympathy thus tenderly and spontaneously offered, or continue to harbour those feelings of sullen resentment which he would otherwise have deemed himself bound to entertain towards one who had presumed to rival him in Ella's affection.

* * * * * *

I will not exhaust the patience of my readers by describing the events of the next few days.

After coming to a full understanding with the Stanleys, Herbert wrote—through Sir Edward, for he could not as yet use his own pen, to James Gordon, explaining the unexpected happiness which had altered and brightened his prospects, and arranging to meet Gordon at Gravesend the night before the *Burdwan* was appointed to sail.

This enabled him to prolong his stay at Penruthven nearly a week beyond the specified fortnight.

Lady Stanley would fain have persuaded him to change his plans, and *Lucy* was perfectly aghast at the idea of his still declaring his determination of abiding by his first decision; but Ella, to whose judgment he finally appealed, encouraged and strengthened him in his purposes. She knew—none better—what it cost him to keep his promise; the terrible struggle between love and duty which had taken place within him ere he could resolve on tearing himself away from her, and though the recollection of the fast-approaching separation loomed darkly before her, and filled her affectionate heart with the keenest anguish, she was too thoroughly conscientious and unselfish to wish to prevent him from following that line of conduct which it seemed right for him to pursue.

When Sir Edward, however, pleaded that at least the *time* of his absence should be shortened, Herbert readily agreed to do his utmost towards getting it reduced from three to two years.

"The thought of *you* will make me work harder, and better, too, I hope," he said, turning to Ella as she made this admission. "Two years will soon glide away," he continued, smiling upon her with a depth of untold love and tenderness, "and then—ah, Ella! how full of joy will be our reunion!"

And Ella answered him not; but her bright head was nestling against his shoulder, and her soft, shy eyes looked up at him through happy glistening tears, and she almost forgot the intervening years of separation while listening to the glowing pictures he began to draw of their future and prospective felicity.

* * * * * *

The parting came, but of that I may not speak.

"Never yet
Hath the full portrait of a man appeared,
And never yet hath dearest bosom friend
Known all that passed in his companion's soul.
Scenes have been there which, happily for man,
No human eye hath witnessed. God alone
Hath looked upon the tortures of the heart,
And He hath looked with pity."

Sir Edward accompanied Herbert to Gravesend, where they found James Gordon and Albert Snapson awaiting them; the latter having, in spite of the precautions they had taken to keep the matter a secret from him, discovered whither Gordon was bound, and insisted on going with him to see Herbert off.

The sun shone brightly, and the sea looked calm and peacefully disposed, when Herbert, after bidding farewell to those firm and faithful friends, and watching with tear-dimmed eyes the swiftly receding boat, as it conveyed them to the shore, took refuge in his cabin.

That day, and the three succeeding ones, everything went well; and captain and crew agreed in promising themselves a fair and prosperous voyage.

Alas! the unfortunate *Burdwan* was, as we have elsewhere seen, doomed to complete destruction, and her hapless passengers plunged into a watery grave.

No words of mine could do justice to the scene that followed; I will, therefore, without dwelling upon any of its harrowing details, which are unhappily too well understood, and too vividly impressed upon every imagination to need repeating, appropriate a few lines of an exquisite poem by the Rev T. A. Holland, thrillingly commemorative of a similar catastrophe which occurred some years previously—

"'Twas twilight; and the pall of eve descended,
Gemmed by the radiance of no twinkling star;
The moon had veiled her glory; but day ended
Without an omen to that ocean-car,
Or portent dire their happy hour to mar:
When sudden came the crash, like thunder pealing,
That smote the shattered vessel nigh in twain,
And she, like drunkard, on the water reeling,
Her gallant trim while fluttering to regain,
Staggered, whirled round, and foundered in the main.

* * * * * *

"Oh, then arose a wildly mournful yell
Of various voices shrieking in despair;
The old, the young, a common fate befel,
A common fate o'ertook the brave and fair

* * * * * *

"The wave is rolling o'er them!—so it rolled
Ere man upon its bosom launched the bark!
So shall relentless roll till time unfold
All into vision of what now is dark,
And kindle into light each heaven-born spark!
Then must the sea her dead give up."

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

A RENEWING OF THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS.

"Turn we a retrospective thought
To scenes and actions long gone by;
Their sights and sounds again are brought,
Identic, home to ear and eye.
All intervenient things the while
Subside, as though they ne'er had been,
And olden themes the sense beguile
As though their date were but yestreen."

REV. T. A. HOLLAND.

"This wandering, ever longer, evermore,
Hath overworn me,
And I know not on what shore
I may rest from my despair." E. B. BROWNING.

"How oft when prospects do look dark,
They're seen just to the surface;
And what appears against us most,
Comes best to suit our purpose."

IT was a cool evening towards the end of autumn.

The dusky shadows of twilight had long since gathered around the ancient town of Lanchester, and the crowded streets were almost deserted—the hum of business having ceased, and peace and quietness succeeded the usual noise and turmoil of the place.

Suddenly a gentleman with grey hair, a worn and peculiarly hopeless expression upon his pale face, and a figure which seemed to have become prematurely bent and shrunken, slowly descended the steps of one of the best hotels, and entering a handsome equipage which stood ready for him, ordered the coachman to drive to the house of Sir Edward Stanley.

"This is the place, sir," said a footman, coming to the door, as the carriage stopped in front of a large, semi-detached, half-country, half-town residence; "shall I ring the bell?"

"No, I will do that myself," replied the gentleman, in a tone which spoke of habitual sadness.

And stepping out to the carriage with the same slow and languid air as he had entered it, he inquired of the servant who answered his summons whether Sir Edward was at home.

The man's decided negative evidently disconcerted him, and he appeared for a minute or two considerably perplexed and agitated.

"Perhaps Lady Stanley——" he said, at length, taking out a card-case as he spoke.

"Her ladyship is also out," replied the servant, not giving him time to complete his sentence.

"That is indeed unfortunate," murmured the gentleman, returning the unopened case to his pocket.

In a louder tone he inquired, "At what hour in the morning shall I be likely to find you master disengaged?"

"I fear you will not be able to see him at all, sir, for the whole family are going down to Cornwall to-morrow, and—— but," he added, suddenly interrupting himself as he noticed the look of patient despair which overshadowed the stranger's countenance, "if you are really anxious to see Sir Edward, I would suggest that you should go to the Town Hall, sir; you will be just in time for the meeting, and can easily speak to him after it is over."

"Town Hall! meeting!" ejaculated the gentleman, in a mystified tone; "what do you mean? I am quite a stranger in Lanchester," he explained, mildly, "having only arrived within the last half-hour; I do not, therefore, of course, know anything that is going on in the place."

"Oh, I see, sir," said the man, respectfully; and he was about to enter into particulars, when the old butler, who happened to be crossing the hall, saw how he was situated, and remarked, remindingly,—

"There is much to be done, James, before her ladyship returns from the meeting."

"So there is," assented his colleague, with a conscious start. "You will excuse me for being so abrupt, sir," he added, turning deprecatingly towards the gentlemen, who had taken the hint, and was moving away, "but we are all in great confusion."

The stranger silently bent his head in acceptance of his apology, and went back to the carriage, while the civil footman, raising his voice, exclaimed, in a tone of conclusive consolation,—

"You will be sure to find him on the platform, sir."

This information had the effect of quickening the gentleman's movements; and his tone was brisker and more energetic, as he called out, on re-entering the carriage,—

"Drive to the Town Hall."

He was obeyed.

One hasty glance at the brilliantly lighted building showed him that, so far, his informant had told him nothing but the truth. There *was* a meeting—of what nature it did not occur to him to ascertain—he therefore resolved to attend it, and take his chance of obtaining an interview with the young baronet.

"I believe this is within a short distance of our hotel?" observed the gentleman inquiringly of his attendants.

"Yes, sir, it's the next street," was the answer.

"Very well, you may leave me here, and I will find my way back on foot."

And, without another word, he made his way into the hall. When there, he paused, and gazed around him in dismay. Every available seat seemed to be occupied, and instead of being able, as he had doubtless intended, to get within reach of the platform, he found it impossible to advance a single step without roughly pushing aside some of those who, having like himself arrived too late to secure seats, were now standing in long rows on each side of the immense hall, filling up every remaining space, and effectually checking the progress of those who would move towards the upper end.

While the stranger stood thus, meditating whether he should remain where he was, just inside the principal doorway, alike screened from observation himself, and prevented from seeing or hearing what

was going on around and beyond him, or effect his escape before other arrivals might render escape somewhat difficult, he was accosted by a young man of pleasing exterior, and calm, gentlemanly bearing, who had followed him into the hall, and witnessed his discomfiture.

"If you will follow me," he said, addressing him in a tone of quiet confidence, "I can easily find you a seat."

A lightning glance, between gratitude and suspicion, was the only answer.

The young man smiled as he met the glance, a frank, genial smile, which partially dissipated the gloom upon the other's face, and made him accept the offer without more ado.

"This way, then," whispered his guide, in a quick, hurried tone; for a slight stir at the upper end denoted that the proceedings were about to begin.

And, taking his unresisting arm, he led him out at the same door by which they had entered, and, passing hastily to the other end of the building, stopped at a smaller door, which was locked. This he opened with a key he carried in his hand, and they found themselves in a narrow passage.

"The place seems very full," remarked the elder stranger, while the other waited to relock the door.

"Yes," he answered, enthusiastically, "it's a goodly sight. But now we must make haste, or we shall be too late for the commencement of the lecture."

"Is there any chance of my being able to have a few minutes' conversation with Sir Edward Stanley?" returned the other, laying a detaining hand upon his arm; "I was told I should be sure to meet him here."

"Sir Edward! Oh, yes, he is on the platform," replied the young man, assuringly. "If you will wait just a second," he added good-naturedly, "I can find out whether there is room for you *there*."

He sprang off, but was back in an instant.

"The platform is filled," he said, shaking his head; "we must go below; but you will be sure to have an opportunity of speaking to Sir Edward at the conclusion of the meeting, as——"

The rest of the sentence remained unspoken, for at that moment they took their seats in front of the platform, and the organ suddenly sent forth its swelling notes, and a thousand voices seemed blended into one mighty tone, while joining with heart and soul in the favourite Old Hundredth Psalm—

> "All people that on earth do dwell,
> Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice," etc.

"This is grand," thought the stranger, who had been quite unprepared for such an outburst of praise; and as he listened, an unwonted moisture passed before his eyes, and a strange sense of pain and humility stirred his heart to its very depths.

When the last note had died away, and perfect silence succeeded, there was a little movement upon the platform, and these words rang loud and clear—albeit with peculiar reverence and grave earnestness—through the whole building,—

"My brethren, let us pray."

What was there in that voice to make the grey-haired stranger

start, and press forward to obtain a glimpse of the face, which, owing to the intervention of a large pillar, he could *not* see? Why, during the fervent and impressive prayer that followed, did every nerve in his frame vibrate and quiver with irrepressible emotion? Why should each tone and inflection have power to thrill through his inmost soul, calling up past events long since buried in the tide of oblivion, reminding him, oh, how vividly! of former scenes, which, his heart told him, could never be renewed, former happiness, which had been quenched in darkness, disappointment, and despair, and opening afresh the wounds which time and a self-reliant spirit had only partially closed?

He could not have explained it. All he knew, or rather *felt*, was that he had suddenly experienced one of those inexplicable mental rebounds which may *once* in a lifetime—*never more*—come like a sort of electric shock upon the slumbering spirit, quickening and transforming it in an instant, apparently without cause, obviously without effect, and making the whole of our enacted being pass as a shifting panorama before our reawakened vision, until every other feeling is swallowed up in dumb surprise, and profound, awe-struck amazement, at the power thus strangely evoked, the potent spell so mysteriously cast around us enabling us to enter into the shadowy penetralia of the long-forgotten past, and unlock those hidden chambers which memory had ere now ceased to visit.

But to return from this digression.

As soon as the prayer was concluded, the anxious hearer, impelled by a forcible impulse, made another effort to obtain a view of the person whose voice had produced such an extraordinary effect upon him. But he found, to his disappointment, that though he might, by stretching himself forward, get sufficiently clear of the pillar to discern what was going on upon one side of the platform, the centre was still concealed, and he could not, with all his exertions, succeed in getting a glimpse of the face he so much wanted to see.

Meanwhile the service proceeded. A chapter from the Scripture was read, another hymn sung, and then the lecturer commenced his discourse.

He began by advocating the cause of missions generally, adverting in earnest and eloquent language to the good they had already accomplished and were still accomplishing throughout the globe.

Next he spoke of Central Africa, and, while dwelling upon the present aspect of that interesting country, and explaining the means which were, in his opinion, necessary towards furthering the grand object they should ever have in view—namely, the advancement of Christ's kingdom—he briefly and modestly referred to his own personal investigation and researches, and the opportunities which had been afforded him of studying its varied capabilities and requirements, with especial reference to the spread of the glorious gospel of peace among such as were still sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Finally, he made a fervent appeal to the hearts and consciences of those around him; represented the danger of such as were content to live on, day after day, and year after year, without caring either for their own souls or the souls of others; warned sinners to flee from the wrath to come; invited the anxious to bring their guilt-laden souls to the Lamb of God; encouraged the timid and waver-

ing to forego their doubts, and shake off their unbelieving fears; besought the backsliding to return to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and renew without delay the dedication of themselves to the Lord; comforted the mourners; strengthened the weak; and endeavoured to establish and confirm the faith of the saints.

Then there was a pause of several seconds; after which the speaker continued, not in firm, full tones as before, but tremblingly, yet with such heartfelt earnestness that every word was distinctly audible,—

"It may be that there are some in this crowded assembly whose hearts have already responded to the Saviour's call, but who have hitherto been deterred from openly confessing Christ by the painful consciousness that they could not thus publicly declare themselves on the Lord's side without being exposed, not only to the perils and persecutions of an ungodly world, but also unto the scorn and reproach of those whom they are bound to honour and obey, and to retain whose good-will and affection they would sacrifice much.

"Ah, my friends! be decided!

"What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his soul?

"What are earthly treasures to that treasure in the heavens that faileth not?

"What are friends, even the dearest and the best, when compared to Christ?

"Listen to His own declaration,—

"'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.' 'And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.'"

Thus far the stranger—as if arrested by some coercive power which *forced* him to listen with feverish eagerness to every word—had remained mute and statue-like upon his chair.

Now he started up, and gazed wildly around him, like one who has suddenly been awakened from some hideous dream, while his face grew white and deathlike in its expression, and the perspiration broke out in large drops upon his forehead.

"You are ill, sir," whispered the young man who had accompanied him into the hall; "allow me to offer you my assistance."

And, drawing his cold hand within his own arm, he was about to lead him out by the same door they had made use of in entering, when his companion wheeled suddenly around, as soon as he had got clear of the before-mentioned pillar, and, with the determination of despair, once more raised his eager eyes to the elevated spot still occupied by the lecturer.

He—the speaker—was in his earnestness leaning at that moment over the rails of the platform, but as his dark eyes, all glowing with the light of a holy zeal and generous enthusiasm, encountered the fixed, stony gaze of the other, his voice faltered, his hand fell heavily to his side, a spasm shot over his manly features, and without attempting to complete his sentence, he sank—from sheer inability to stand—into a seat, and turning to a gentleman who sat near him, huskily begged him to pronounce the benediction.

"My dear fellow, what *is* the matter?" asked Sir Edward, coming up to him in dismay; "I never knew you so abrupt before."

"I could not help it," replied Herbert—for he it was—"I've seen *him!*" he added, gaspingly.

"Whom? Surely not Mr. Seymour?"

Herbert bent his head, and, escaping from the inquiries of his other friends, he took Sir Edward's arm, and retired with him into a small committee room which opened upon the platform.

There they found *Mr. Seymour* lying back in a chair, with closed eyes, but a quivering and agitated countenance.

He had, at the urgent request of his friendly attendant allowed himself to be conveyed thither, without having the least idea that he would so soon be brought face to face with his son!

When, therefore he unclosed his eyes, after a short interval of silence (during which the young man who had been of so much assistance to him quietly withdrew, and *Herbert*, instead of advancing towards his father, or making the slightest effort to claim his notice, retreated to a distant part of the room), and saw in whose presence he was, Mr. Seymour gave way to an uncontrollable burst of emotion, and, half rising from his seat, exclaimed, in a broken, tremulous voice,—

"Then it was no cruel dream, sent to mock me in my misery! no mere illusion of the senses! O Herbert, my son, my son! has the sea in very deed given up its dead?"

And, stretching out his trembling hands, he regarded him with an eager, wistful, yearning look, as if he would fain clasp him to his breast.

And how did Herbert act? Did he rush into his father's arms, and in that one sweet moment of reconcilement forget all his past sufferings?

Alas, no! strange though it may appear, he neither by word nor deed responded to the proffered amity, albeit his varying colour, and the vibrating motion of his nostrils, as he stood contemplating his father in moody silence, with his elbow resting upon the mantelshelf, and his lips compressed into an expression of firm severity, betrayed something of the inward workings of his heart, and showed that it cost him no inconsiderable effort to maintain this cold exterior towards the desolate old man, who so touchingly sued for his affection.

"He refuses to speak to me," murmured Mr. Seymour, with an appealing glance at Sir Edward; "and yet I cannot blame him," he added, tottering back to his seat; "he would not be a Seymour if he could readily forgive all the indignities I have heaped upon him. It was I who banished him from his rightful home, deprived him of his mother's love, and robbed him of everything which makes life desirable; and *now* he disowns me—well, what else could I expect?"

Still Herbert uttered not a syllable, though he was evidently moved by those tones of patient despair; for, burying his head in his hands with a gesture of pain, he sighed heavily.

"And yet you cannot *wholly* have ceased to love us, Herbert?" pleaded the old man, rising once more, and laying his hand upon his son's arm; "for the sake of the past—for your mother's sake——"

"Name her not!" said Herbert, in a hoarse whisper, as he raised his head, and displayed a face all contracted and convulsed with the deepest heart anguish. Mr. Seymour started back in amaze. "It is the worst argument you could bring forward," continued the young man, a stern light glittering in his eye, and a crimson flush overspreading his brow. "A hundred times have I tried to forgive the

wrong you inflicted upon *her;* and until I saw you I fancied I had succeeded, but now I feel I was mistaken——"

"Ah, Herbert! you do not know what I have endured," interrupted his father; "if suffering can make amends——"

"Alas, it is too late to repair the injury," returned he, dejectedly; "I know it seems ungenerous to reproach you," he added, struggling with the various contending passions which agitated his breast; "but what can I do? whenever I try to regard you with kindness or affection, the thought of *my mother* comes like an impassable barrier between us. If she had lived, I would have welcomed this reconciliation, oh, how thankfully and joyfully! but now it only seems to add to my bitterness."

Here he fairly broke down, and again covering his face with his hands, gave way to an irrepressible groan of anguish.

A sudden ray of hope illumined Mr. Seymour's countenance, and a cry of delighted surprise escaped his lips.

"Is it possible that the false tidings of her death reached you?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes, when I landed at the Cape, an English newspaper was put into my hands by a person with whom I was slightly acquainted; and there I read—— but why do you call it *false* tidings?" he abruptly and breathlessly demanded, gazing from one to the other in painful perplexity.

"A few days later that announcement was contradicted," replied Mr. Seymour, with emotion.

"What?" gasped Herbert, looking round to Sir Edward, as if for confirmation of the good news.

"Indeed, it is true," assented the latter, in a tone of the warmest sympathy; "I read both the notice and the contradiction."

"O Edward, why did you not mention this in your letters?" exclaimed Herbert, with trembling lips; "what months of suffering I should have been spared!"

"My poor Herbert, I am so grieved," said the kind-hearted baronet, looking greatly distressed, but I assure you we acted for the best."

"I know it, my dear friend," returned Herbert, gently pressing his hand.

"We deemed it so improbable that you should have seen that unfortunate paper, especially as you never alluded to the subject in any of your own communications."

"And is she still alive?" inquired Herbert, in low, earnest tones, of his father.

"Thank God she is," was Mr. Seymour's grateful response.

"Thank God indeed!" reverently re-echoed Herbert; and, clasping his hands fervently together, he remained for a moment absorbed in secret devotion. "Now then," he cried at length, coming forward with outstretched hands, while his eyes expanded with reawakened tenderness, and a smile of peculiar softness played around his mouth, "I retract all my former bitter words. My father—my dear father, I cannot tell you how rejoiced I am to be able once more to claim the privilege of calling you by that much-loved name, and to feel that I have still a share in your affection."

"And can you really forgive me?" asked Mr. Seymour, folding his arm around him, and gazing wistfully into his animated counte-

nance. "When I saw you standing there, so apparently cold and stern, I trembled, lest the same pride which has been all through life my own besetting sin, should lead you in your turn to renounce me and my offered affection. O Herbert," he repeated, with wishful eagerness, "are you *sure* that you can forgive me for all that I have made you suffer?"

"Hush! you must not ask my forgiveness," said Herbert, in an unsteady voice. "From henceforth, dear father, we will 'let the dead past bury its dead,' and begin to think of the future. Where is my mother?"

"Here—in Lanchester, I mean—we only arrived this evening."

"Would there be any risk in my going to her?"

"No, I trust not," said Mr. Seymour, meditatingly; "you are in her thoughts night and day, and she is always expecting to encounter you. It was by her special request that we came to Lanchester in quest of you, she having suddenly discovered you had for some time resided here."

"In quest of me!" cried Herbert, looking exceedingly puzzled; "I understood you to say you considered I had been drowned."

"Ah, yes! but she—oh, I have not explained to you her condition yet. It's rather a long story. As, however, you *must* hear it before you see her, I will strive to be as concise as possible."

And, beginning at the commencement of Mrs. Seymour's illness, he briefly narrated what had since occurred, and the strange hallucination under which she subsequently laboured regarding her son's protracted absence, as well as the firm conviction she entertained that she would ere long have the happiness of seeing him restored to her.

Herbert was intensely affected while listening to the account of their travels during the last three years. Mr. Seymour told him how, step by step, they had followed the same route taken by himself and his companions so long before; and how, when disappointed of falling in with the object of their search in one place, she looked forward with unabated expectancy to the prospect of having her hopes crowned with success in the next.

"Nothing seemed to depress her," added Mr. Seymour, in conclusion; "for when, after travelling all over the Continent, without attaining the end she had in view, instead of sinking down to despondency (as I greatly feared would be the case), she began to talk of returning to England, for the purpose of prosecuting her inquiries among our own personal friends. This ordeal," he exclaimed, with deep emotion, "has, thank Heaven, been spared us both."

"My dear father, you have indeed suffered," said Herbert, taking the old man's hand, and tenderly pressing it to his lips. "If I had only known it, how happy should I have been to relieve you from your anxiety!"

"I could not not have borne it much longer," he replied, huskily; "it was killing me by inches. But it is past now," he continued, a happy smile trembling on his lips, "and I feel already another person."

"What made my mother think of coming to Lanchester?" asked Herbert, presently.

"A young man whom we first met in Paris—a Mr. Cleveland—and of whom we afterwards saw a good deal, accidentally mentioned one

day in her presence that he had spent an evening with you in this neighbourhood."

"Ah, I remember," said Herbert, slightly compressing his lips, as he exchanged a significant glance with Sir Edward (who, I may observe, *en passant*, had several times ere this attempted to leave the father and son together, but was begged by Mr. Seymour to remain. He could not, so he touchingly remarked, forget who it was that had nursed and cared for Herbert when he was lying at death's door, a stranger in a strange place, neglected and forsaken by his own unnatural father; and henceforth it would, he said, be his joy and pride to be permitted to class the young baronet among his most valued and choicest friends).

"And then?" resumed the son.

"And then she insisted upon our immediately setting out for Lanchester; and no sooner had we arrived than she suddenly remembered that her old friend Lady Stanley used formerly to reside here, and she urged me to lose not a moment in calling upon Sir Edward, and finding out from him where you were to be found."

"My poor mother!" ejaculated Herbert, softly; "do let us go to her at once."

Sir Edward shook his head. "You must not be abrupt," he interposed, gravely; "in her delicate state of health, any sudden emotion might be attended with very serious results. Would it not be well," he inquired of Mr. Seymour, "for you to return home with us, and consult my mother as to the most prudent course to adopt?"

"It is growing late," returned Mr. Seymour, who appeared rather embarrassed, "and I scarcely like obtruding myself upon Lady Stanley."

"Pray don't refuse me," said Sir Edward, warmly; "she loves Herbert as her own son, and would be sorry indeed if you hesitated to avail yourself of her assistance. If you fear to leave Mrs. Seymour so long alone, we might call at the hotel, and leave a message which, if cautiously worded, may in some measure prepare her——"

"Yes, yes, that will do," eagerly assented Mr. Seymour.

And he left the hall, leaning upon his son's arm.

Sir Edward's carriage was waiting for them outside, and after driving to the hotel, and leaving the proposed message, they rapidly proceeded to the baronet's house, where Lady Stanley and her daughter had arrived more than half an hour previously.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

REUNION.

"And will I see his face again?
And will I hear him speak?
I'm downright dizzy wi' the thought:
In troth, I'm like to greet." W. J. MICKLE.

"The warmest love that can grow cold—
This is a mother's love." JAMES MONTGOMERY.

"MY good Willson, what o'clock is it?"

These words were uttered in rather a querimonious voice by a delicate-looking lady, who was half-sitting, half-reclining upon a softly cushioned sofa, near a bright fire, which the coolness of the evening, and the large size of the well-furnished apartment rendered both cheerful and pleasant.

"Indeed, ma'am, it is getting very late," replied our old friend Willson, coming instantly forward, and revealing, as she stood exposed to the full glare of the massive chandelier, a face on which time and anxiety had left many furrows. "Do you not think you should retire to rest? I am sure you must be tired after your long journey."

"Yes, I *am* tired," said Mrs. Seymour, with a little sigh of weariness. "Still, I should like to wait until Mr. Seymour returns. I can't help fancying he will bring me some news of Herbert."

To this Willson made no reply. She was so painfully accustomed to these and similar observations that she never now attempted to answer them, though within the last few weeks her fears as to the issue of this ceaseless and vain pursuit after a person who was—so she firmly believed—peacefully sleeping beneath the ocean wave, had begun to assume a more definite form, and she was on the point of relinquishing even the faint hope she had hitherto fostered (almost against her reason) that the unfortunate lady's monomania regarding her long-lost son would gradually subside, or be suddenly exchanged for some other and less harassing chimera.

"I don't believe my husband would remain so long away," continued Mrs. Seymour, after a pause, "unless he—— But what is that?" she hastily exclaimed, as the sound of suppressed voices outside, followed by the opening and shutting of one of the doors of an adjoining apartment, spoke of an arrival; "can he have returned?"

"I'll go and see," said Willson, with an involuntary sigh of patient endurance.

But ere she could do more than rise from the seat she had just resumed, Mr. Seymour himself stood before them.

"Here I am at last, my dear," he observed in a tone of forced composure; and going behind his wife's sofa he leant forward and pressed his lips to her forehead.

"Have you any tidings for me?" she asked, in a tone of slight impatiently.

"Tidings!" he repeated, trying to disguise his emotion in a tone of light and playful tenor. "Ah, my dear!" shaking his head good humouredly, "you are sadly unreasonable."

"But you have not answered my question," persisted Mrs. Seymour, a slight frown contracting her brow.

"I have brought your old friend Lady Stanley to see you, as I supposed——"

"Where is she?"—starting up with animation.

"Are you sure that you feel equal to the exertion of receiving her to-night?" questioned Mr. Seymour, in some anxiety.

"Oh, yes, I shall be most happy to have an opportunity of speaking to her about Herbert," replied the lady, with energy. "I have not the slightest doubt that she can give some information regarding his movements."

"Well, I really believe you are right," returned Mr. Seymour, with an air of one who has been all at once convinced of the truth of an assertion which he had hitherto refused to credit.

"Do you hear that, Willson?" cried Mrs. Seymour, triumphantly; "even Mr. Seymour, is at last converted to my opinion! although he *did* try to persuade me that our coming to Lanchester would be attended with no satisfactory result."

"Yes, I must confess myself to be in the wrong," was her husband's candid response, "and I am thankful indeed now that I took your advice, my dear."

"Ah, I knew how it would be," complacently rejoined Mrs. Seymour; "but what have you heard?"

"That Lady Stanley will explain," said the happy man; and moving away from her with a smile of unspeakable satisfaction, he quickly recrossed the large room, and disappeared through the half-opened door.

When he returned, after the lapse of a few seconds, Lady Stanley was leaning upon his arm.

"Now I will leave you together," he said, exchanging a meaning glance with the latter, as soon as their first cordial greetings were over.

And, beckoning to the astonished Willson to follow, he adjourned with her into another room.

"Sit down and listen to me, my good friend," he said, gently placing her in a chair. "I have news for you."

"O sir," she wailed, leaning back in a disconsolate attitude, "what *has* happened now? What fresh piece of deception are we called upon to practise?"

"Hush! don't excite yourself," said Mr. Seymour, laying his hand soothingly upon her shoulder.

"Alas! I can't help it," she replied, mournfully shaking her head; "when I see things so evidently growing worse instead of better, I naturally begin to ask myself where it will all end."

"Do you remember," interposed Mr. Seymour, in a slow and impressive voice, "how on one never-to-be-forgotten night, or rather morning, you came to me, and told me that she, whom I mourned as dead, was through God's mercy restored to life?—do you remember this, Willson?"

"Yes, yes," she answered apparently, surprised at the question; "could it be otherwise?"

"And do you not think that He who brought *her* back from the very gates of the grave could, if it had pleased Him, have preserved my son also from the fury of the wave?"

"Surely His power is infinite," murmured the old woman, with tearful eyes.

"Well, listen to me, then," proceeded Mr. Seymour, quickly. Supposing I had this evening heard (we are merely imagining a case, you know,) that Herbert—nay, don't start and look so terribly agitated, or I shall be unable to finish my sentence—that Herbert," he repeated, in a firm tone, "is, notwithstanding his reported death, still alive——"

"O sir, do not trifle with me," gasped Willson, with white, trembling lips; "but, no," hastily correcting herself, "*you* would never do that, especially on such a subject. Alive! it cannot be! Did I not read the account with my own eyes? and did I not——"

"And yet it *has* occasionally happened," observed Mr. Seymour, suggestively, "that *some* have escaped, even when all were believed to have perished."

"Oh, if it were only true!" aspirated Willson, clasping her withered hands together, while her face assumed an expression of mingled ecstasy and incredulity.

"Yes, if it were only true," echoed Mr. Seymour, in an apparently musing tone, "all our difficulties would be happily over. Instead of this heart-breaking suspense, these perpetual wanderings, and oft-recurring annoyances, these constantly reiterated inquiries, and never-ending discussion upon the same painful theme, we should feel ourselves once more free, and be able to——"

"Forgive me for interrupting you, sir," said Willson, looking at him with the greatest apprehension; "but do not, I beg of you, allow your thoughts to dwell upon what is never likely to be realized. It would only be adding tenfold to your present misery, were you to encourage hopes which afterwards turned out to be fallacious."

"But, Willson," replied Mr. Seymour, in a low tone, "*what if I had seen him*, and could, therefore, *myself* bear testimony to his being alive?"

"Seen him!" cried Willson, almost wildly; "am I dreaming? Did you say *you* had seen him?" she asked, in accents of amazed perplexity.

"Yes," answered the happy father, gazing down upon her with glistening eyes; "thank God, my poor ill-used boy still lives; and more than that," dropping his voice to a whisper, "he has forgiven me."

"Then I may say with Simeon, 'Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace,'" murmured the venerable woman; "let me once witness the joyful meeting, and my work on earth will be accomplished—there will be no further need for me here."

"You must not talk like this, my old friend," returned Mr. Seymour, with emotion. "We can't spare you yet. You should try to live, if for no other reason, to enable me to make up to you in some small measure for——"

"Ah, never speak of that, sir," said Willson, hastily; "my heart would have been harder than flint, if I could see your noble and self-

sacrificing efforts to render my beloved mistress happy during these last sad years of anxiety and trouble, and not feel that you had already abundantly atoned for the past. And as regards your conduct towards *myself*," she added tearfully, "words would fail me, were I to attempt to describe what you have done for me."

And in truth he *had* treated her with the greatest kindness and consideration.

Ever since that memorable night when she was of such inestimable service to him, he had been always regardful of her slightest wish, and tried in every possible way to render her possition endurable, and spare her from anything in the shape of exertion or fatigue.

There were, of course, certain annoyances and painful inconveniences arising from the peculiar state of Mrs. Seymour's mind, and the tenacity with which she insisted on appropriating the society of her favourite old nurse, from which not all Mr. Seymour's vigilance could save her; nevertheless, he contrived to shield her from much that was trying and disagreeable, and took upon himself many unpleasant and thankless tasks, which must otherwise have devolved upon her.

Wherever they went, his first care (after seeing to his wife's comfort) was for Willson. He ordered a private sitting-room to be prepared for her at every stage of their journey, so that she might, if she felt so disposed, indulge her love for quiet, and escape occasionally from the restraints of her mistress's presence; and in their suite were numbered, not only their own personal attendants (including his own valet and Mrs. Seymour's maid), but a trustworthy servant whom Mr. Seymour had engaged before leaving England, for the express purpose of devoting herself exclusively to the aged woman's requirements, and whom he had repeatedly charged to see that no trouble was spared, no expenditure withheld, in supplying her with anything and everything which could add in the smallest degree to her temporal comforts.

But to return. After a short pause, during which Willson's lips moved, though her voice uttered no sound, she managed to ask, in a half-articulate whisper,—

"Where is he, sir?"

"Will you promise me to keep calm if I tell you?"

"I'll do my best, sir," was the meekly spoken answer, though a faint flash in her mild grey eyes told that it would not be easy.

"Well, he is here," said Mr. Seymour, lowering his voice, and pointing to a door at the opposite extremity of the apartment, "in that room."

"Oh!" and without waiting for more, she had sprung from her seat, and was half-way across the floor.

"Wait a moment," said Mr. Seymour, intercepting her just as she was about to lay hold of the handle of the door, "and I will bring him to you. He is not alone," he added, in an explanatory tone; "Sir Edward Stanley and another gentleman are with him."

Hearing this, Willson stepped back; and Mr. Seymour having opened the door and silently beckoned to Herbert to join them, returned immediately to her side, saying, remindingly,—

"Now there must be no excited exclamations, or Mrs. Seymour may hear."

Willson answered not. She was standing with clasped hands and

parted lips, waiting in an attitude of expectancy for Herbert's appearance.

Presently he came.

"My dear old Willson," he said, holding out both his hands, "how glad Iam to see you again!"

"O Mr. Herbert, is it really yourself?" she replied, scanning his countenance with eager and affectionate wistfulness. "God be thanked," she murmured, as he stooped and kissed her withered cheek, "that I have lived to see this day!"

"And my poor mother?" said Herbert, softly, after they had conversed together for a few minutes; "has Lady Stanley prepared her for meeting me?"

"I will go and find out," replied Mr. Seymour, "and, Willson, you had better come too; we may be in need of your assistance."

"I hope there is no danger of her being excited?" observed the young man, a little anxiously, as he noted the sudden gravity of Willson's face.

"It is not *that* I'm afraid of," she replied, dubiously shaking her head; "but don't you think," turning abruptly to Mr. Seymour, "we ought to call in a medical man, in case we found it necessary to——"

"We have already taken that precaution," quickly rejoined Herbert; "Dr. Gibson is in the next room with Sir Edward Stanley, so that we could at any instant avail ourselves of his services."

"Have you reason to consider him skilful?" inquired Mr. Seymour, in a low tone, "because this being a peculiar case, requires peculiar treatment."

"He is decidedly the cleverest physician in Lanchester," was Herbert's confident response. "I am myself greatly indebted to him for the extreme kindness and attention he paid me during a long and very severe illness I had when I first arrived here some years ago."

"Ah, that terrible time!" ejaculated Mr. Seymour, almost with a shudder; "often and often have I thought of it since, and never without feeling a pang of remorse at my cruel desertion of you, my——"

"The past again," interrupted Herbert, half reproachfully; "my dear father, I fancied we had decided that *it* should be from henceforth a tabooed subject with us."

"It is not easy to forget," replied Mr. Seymour, "but I will try." And though he sighed at the recollection of his former injustice, he smiled likewise.

Before bringing the conversation between herself and Mrs. Seymour to the precise point she wished, Lady Stanley preferred encouraging her poor friend to talk of herself, and her as yet unsuccessful attempts to find her son, in order that she might be thus unabled to form a pretty accurate idea of the present scope of Mrs. Seymour's mental capacity, and decide whether the important communication she had in store for her would be likely to be followed by any unfavourable consequences.

The result of her investigation was in the highest degree satisfactory, and she proceeded without further delay—cautiously and with gentle, womanly tact—to hint at the possibility of Herbert's speedy arrival.

When she had allowed the anxious mother a sufficient time to reflect upon this intelligence, Lady Stanley tried to make her realize the fact of his being at that moment in Lanchester, by describing him in terms

of warm and affectionate admiration, and ended by speaking of his intense love for his mother, and the great anxiety he must at that moment be enduring, lest she should punish him for his long absence by refusing to see him until the next day.

"Oh, that would be very unkind of me," said the poor lady, rousing herself from a sort of reverie in which she seemed to have fallen; "if I knew where he was, I would instantly send and tell him to come to me at once. I don't wonder at his being rather ashamed to face us, after remaining away so long, but he need not be afraid that we shall resent it."

"Then I may bring him in immediately, if he should have arrived?" questioned Lady Stanley, rising from her seat. "Oh, here is Mr. Seymour," she added, as the door just then opened, and that gentleman appeared on the threshold; "he will be able to tell us."

A glance at his wife's face showed him that she was prepared for the meeting.

Without a word, therefore, he took Herbert by the arm, and, leading him forward, with smiling lips, but eyes which glistened with feeling, exclaimed, in a low, tremulous voice,—

"Here he is, my dear."

"At last!" murmured Mrs. Seymour, springing eagerly from her couch, and gazing at him for half a minute with an expression of joyous bewilderment and intense delight. *Then*, when she found herself folded in his strong arms, and felt his warm kisses upon her cheeks, and the happy tears which, man though he was, Herbert could not restrain, she gave way to one convulsive, soblike sound; her face became overspread with a deadly pallor, her hands grew cold and rigid, and she would have fallen upon the floor, had not her son caught her up, and laid her with tender care on the sofa she had so lately vacated.

"Don't alarm yourselves," said Dr. Gibson, whose assistance they instantly procured; "joy rarely kills."

And with this assurance they tried to console themselves, though Herbert, who was greatly shocked and grieved at the sad change which had taken place in his poor mother's appearance since last he had seen her, found it very difficult to restrain his feelings, or to persuade himself that this sudden reaction from hope deferred to the perfect realization of her hitherto unaccomplished desire, would not prove fatal.

"She looks so weak and fragile," he said, mournfully, to Lady Stanley, when she endeavoured to comfort him. "I fear this will shake her terribly."

"Forbear these desponding thoughts, my son," interposed Mr. Seymour, who had drawn near them unperceived, leaving Willson and the doctor to use the necessary means towards restoring their patient to consciousness; "when she once gets over this, there will be no more danger."

"*Will* she get over it?" was Herbert's gloomy reply, accompanied by a very melancholy shake of the head.

"Herbert!" And Mr. Seymour laid his trembling hand upon his son's arm, and gazed into his face with an expression of firm trust and confidence which surprised while it encouraged him. "The unexpected and totally undeserved goodness and mercy I have this night experienced lead me to hope and believe that the same beneficent

Being who has thus wonderfully preserved us to meet again under such auspicious circumstances, will continue to carry on the work He has so graciously begun, and spare us yet a little while together, for the purpose of strengthening and cementing the bond of union which now most happily binds our family together."

"Would it not be a good plan to have Mrs. Seymour conveyed, while in this state, to her own apartment?" inquired Lady Stanley of the doctor, whom she presently joined.

"Yes; I was about to suggest it," he answered, in a low tone; "it will be much better for her to open her eyes upon a new scene, instead of being all at once reminded of what has occurred."

And turning again to his patient, he began to superintend her removal into another room.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

MR. SEYMOUR'S WISHES ANTICIPATED.

"Oh, lost and found! all gentle souls below
Their dearest welcome shall prepare." KEBLE.

"I watched the little flutterings,
The doubt my mother would not see;
She spoke at large of many things,
And at the last she spoke of me;
And turning, looked upon your face,
As near this door you sat apart,
And rose, and with a silent grace,
Approaching, pressed you heart to heart."
TENNYSON.

WHEN Mrs. Seymour awoke to consciousness, she found herself lying upon her bed, attended only—as she supposed—by Willson, who was leaning over her, with a vessel containing some sort of cordial in her hand, and an anxious, troubled expression upon her careworn face.

A low-breathed sigh of relief escaped her lips as the poor lady opened her eyes and cast a glance of inquiry around the large but dimly lighted room.

"Where am I, Willson?" she asked in tones of faint surprise. "I think I must have been dreaming," she continued, without waiting for an answer to the question, "so many things seemed to have happened. I fancied I had a long conversation with Lady Stanley, who came to tell me about Herbert, and *then* I actually saw him—yes, saw him myself! and heard him speak; but afterwards it was all confusion. What could it mean? Was it nothing but a dream?"

And starting from her recumbent position, she rubbed her eyes, and essayed to collect her scattered senses.

"Perhaps it was something better than a dream," warily suggested Willson; "I'm sure it's high time for us to be hearing about Mr. Herbert—and seeing him, too, for that matter—after taking so much pains to find him."

For several succeeding minutes Mrs. Seymour appeared lost in thought, and though her visual orbs were fastened upon Willson's countenance with apparent intelligence, it was evident to her sharp-sighted attendant that she was for the time quite unconscious of her presence.

A slight quiver passing over the delicate features gave the first token of returning recognition.

Then she drew a long and deepened inspiration, and addressing Willson in a short, hurried voice, asked abruptly,—

"*Has* Lady Stanley been here?"

"Yes, and is still here, my dear Mrs. Seymour," replied her ladyship, coming forward *in propriâ personâ*.

"And Herbert?" whispered Mrs. Seymour, returning the pressure of her friend's hand, and gazing earnestly and wistfully into her face.

"He is here also," answered Mrs. Stanley, in her peculiarly gentle and soothing tones.

"Then it was all true?" questioned Mrs. Seymour, below her breath.

Lady Stanley assented.

"Ah, I remember it now!" exclaimed the poor lady, with sudden animation and a quick flash of delighted recollection; "I should much like to talk to him. Can I see him?" added she, looking imploringly up in Lady Stanley's face."

"We are rather afraid it might be too exciting for you just at present," replied the latter, after glancing inquiringly at Willson; "still if you think you could bear it——"

"Bear it," interposed Mrs. Seymour, with a little laugh, "of course I can; it will do me more good than anything else."

"Very well," said Lady Stanley, "I will send him to you; and as I shall probably be gone before your conversation is over, I will take this opportunity of wishing you good night."

"I hope we shall meet again to-morrow," responded her friend, warmly embracing her; "I want to thank you for bringing Herbert back to us, and also to hear all about his movements during the past few years."

"You will find out that from himself," smilingly rejoined Lady Stanley; "but I will be sure to call in the morning."

And leaving her under Willson's care, she rejoined the others in the drawing-room, and explained to Dr. Gibson the nature of Mrs. Seymour's wish.

"It is perfectly natural," said that gentleman, in a tone of cheerful confidence; "and if you, sir," turning meaningly to Herbert, who bent his head in silent acquiescence, "are prepared to obey the injunctions I have already given you, there can be no risk whatever in acceding to your mother's request."

Accordingly our hero lost not a moment in proceeding to Mrs. Seymour's apartment, where he remained for upwards of an hour. She would have detained him still longer, but her husband, wishing to put an end to an interview which must, he knew, in spite of every precaution, be attended with some sort of agitation, and knowing what motive would be most likely to influence her, came suddenly in upon them, and aroused all her motherly sympathies by gently reminding her of the lateness of the hour, and expressing his fears that, unless Herbert was at once allowed to retire to rest, he would suffer from the effects of the various kinds of excitement he had that day undergone.

Hearing this, she instantly dismissed him for the night (or rather morning, for it was long past midnight), earnestly charging Willson to see that his comforts were properly attended to.

Mr. Seymour looked ten years younger when he and Herbert met at a late breakfast.

The latter had already found time to pay a short visit to the Stanleys, as he was anxious to discover whether they had made any change in their former arrangements; and now, by Lady Stanley's express desire, he proposed to his father that they should give up

their rooms at the hotel, and spend a few weeks with his friends, either at their town house or Penruthven.

Both Ella and her mother had requested Herbert to refrain from mentioning his engagement until they gave him permission; and though he dreaded lest his marriage, which had been arranged to take place without delay, might in consequence be kept back for some weeks longer, he was obliged to yield a reluctant assent to their wishes.

Mr. Seymour little guessed, therefore, the secret of his son's evident anxiety to remain near the Stanleys; but it was not likely that any desire of his should at such a time be disregarded; and when towards the evening Sir Edward and Lady Stanley arrived at the hotel, and after repeating their invitation suggested that they should return with them at once, they found no difficulty in inducing Mrs. Seymour, as well as her husband, to fall in with their wishes.

During the next few days Mr. Seymour derived much pleasure, not, however, unmixed with acute pain, in visiting the various places where his son had been accustomed, three years previously, to spend so large a portion of his time.

Many happy hours were passed in Herbert Cottage with James Gordon—now the Rev. Mr. Gordon—from whom he heard our hero's praises enthusiastically proclaimed (whenever the subject of their eulogy happened to be out of earshot), and to whom, after being informed of all the delicate kindness and generosity he had so nobly and withal so modestly displayed, while devoting himself heart and hand to Herbert's interests, Mr. Seymour behaved with the greatest courtesy and most grateful warmth of feeling.

Of Albert Snapson they saw nothing, the state of his health having rendered it imperative that he should seek a milder climate; and his father, to the intense annoyance and consternation of Mrs. Snapson (who gave it as her opinion that all her other children seemed born to be sacrificed to this one idolised stripling, an opinion in which the fiery Arabella heartily concurred), not only resolved on himself accompanying Albert to Madeira, where his medical advisers had recommended him to reside for some years, but also insisted upon taking the whole family.

All except Henry.

He—perceiving that in proportion as Albert's delicacy became apparent, so did Mr. Snapson's suspicion and dislike towards himself appear to increase; and foreseeing long years of irksome bondage before him, if he still maintained his old time-serving spirit—turned a deaf ear to Arabella's indignant remonstrances and his mother's worldly-wise maxims (both of whom felt that it would be an immense degradation for a son of the Hon. Henry Grey to stoop to *work* for his daily bread), and very sensibly proposed to his step-father that he should be allowed a share in one of his manufactories, and, instead of continuing a permanent burden upon his hands, have the satisfaction of knowing that he was in a fair way of acquiring an independency for himself.

This proposition, although it took Mr. Snapson at first by surprise, relieved him greatly, and he unhesitatingly agreed to the young man's reasonable request, rewarding him for having, as he expressed it (Mr. Snapson was, it will be observed, no admirer of his wife's high-born relations), "shaken off the trammels of that foolish pride and prejudice

which was the *bête noire* of his mother's family," by affording him every facility for accomplishing his desire, and acting in pecuniary matters with unwonted liberality.

He could afford to be generous (so he told himself) now that he knew what Henry's motives and expectations were; and the consciousness that he had hitherto treated him with injustice made him all the more wishful to atone in some measure for having so grievously misinterpreted his character.

Had anything been wanting to convince him of his error in suspecting him of *feigning* affection which he did not feel, and *submitting* to mortifications which he burnt to resent *merely* for the sake of furthering his own selfish views, the parting between him and Albert would have sufficed to show that he was, to say the least of it, tenderly attached to his younger brother.

For days before the dreaded hour arrived he could neither eat nor sleep; he grew pale and haggard; and though he tried, for Albert's sake, to conceal his emotion, it was sufficiently evident to every one else.

As for Albert, it is certain that he would not so quietly have submitted to the separation, but he was kept in profound ignorance of what was going on until the very last, and then the information he received on the subject was so mystifying and ambiguous, and no time nor opportunity afforded him of discovering the real state of the case, that he could only jump to the conclusion that Henry—like Mrs. Snapson and Arabella, who were constantly grumbling or inventing some cause to rail against Madeira, and deploring the cruel fate which compelled them to go there—had petitioned his father to allow him to remain at home instead of accompanying them.

And so Henry commenced his career of unshackled industry! and notwithstanding the numerous obstacles and difficulties he must necessarily encounter before attaining the object of his newly awakened ambition, he found the life of activity and manly toil he had thus wisely chosen far preferable to the unenviable position he had for so many years occupied in Mr. Snapson's household.

A fortnight elapsed without any allusion being made to Herbert's approaching marriage, but one evening the ice was broken.

They had all been sitting together in the drawing-room, engaged in cheerful conversation, when a servant appeared with a note, which he presented to Lady Stanley, who, after reading it, went downstairs to write an answer.

While she was absent, Sir Edward begged his sisters to look over the last few bars of a piece of sacred music he had been composing for the organ.

"Where the fault lies, I don't know," he said, laughingly; "but I'm quite ready to admit that there is one—perhaps your eyes may be able to detect it."

"I suppose we must humour him, Ella," remarked Lucy, smiling good-naturedly as she rose from her seat, "it will not detain us long;" and with a word of apology to Mr. Seymour, and a playful caution to Herbert to stay where he was until their return, she passed into the music-room with Sir Edward and her sister.

Mr. Seymour unconsciously watched them as they vanished through the wide folding-doors.

When the last vestige of Ella's white dress had disappeared, he

gave utterance to a little sigh, and then turning to his son he grasped him by the arm, saying falteringly, and with obvious embarrassment,—

"I would not for the world wish to force your inclinations, my dear boy, but if you could make up your mind to marry——"

"To marry!" echoed Herbert, starting and growing pale; "I hope —that is——" he stammered, "I ought——"

"Yes, you certainly ought to do so," assented his father, entirely misunderstanding the nature of his agitation. "By the bye, what sweet girls these Miss Stanleys are!" he added, somewhat abruptly.

"Yes, I knew you would like them," said Herbert, averting his face from the other's eager gaze.

"With one of *them* for your wife, how happy you might be!" pursued Mr. Seymour, in a confidential tone; "don't you think so, my dear Herbert?" rather anxiously.

A few inarticulate words was the only response, and Mr. Seymour went on in a slightly disappointed voice,—

"Almost from the first moment I saw you together I fancied you were made for each other—*she*, so lovely in person, so gifted in mind, so gentle in disposition, so——"

"Who are you speaking of?—which do you mean?" interrupted Herbert, with a sudden flashing of his dark eyes, and involuntary trembling of his lips.

"I was referring to the youngest," answered Mr. Seymour, regarding him in great dubiety; "but——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Herbert, stooping to pick up his mother's pocket-handkerchief.

Before he could say more, and before Mr. Seymour could succeed in obtaining a glimpse of his face, which was lighted up with intense satisfaction, Lady Stanley re-entered the room, and the conversation was turned into another channel, Herbert meanwhile silently stealing out of the apartment.

In less than five minutes he returned, with Ella leaning upon his arm; and, going up to Mr. Seymour, after briefly responding to Lady Stanley's half-inquiring, half-reproachful shake of the head, by a shrug made up of deprecation and defiance, he said, glancing tenderly and admiringly down upon the beautiful creature, whose face was covered with blushes,—

"My dear father, allow me the pleasure of presenting to you your future daughter."

"Herbert! my boy—is it possible?" cried the old man, in tones of tremulous delight; "I can scarce believe it!" he added, passing his hand hastily across his eyes; "the very thing that I longed to happen. How strange! how delightful!"

"My dear," he continued, recovering himself somewhat, and taking Ella's hand in both his own, you must permit me to give you a parent's greeting, and to tell you how inexpressibly happy I am at the choice Herbert has made."

And bending down, he drew the fair face close to his own, and kissed it, murmuring to himself, "It seems like a dream! No sooner do I express my wish, than lo! it is carried into effect."

"Now let me speak," said Mrs. Seymour, upon whose mind the truth had suddenly dawned; "my darling girl," folding her in her arms, and softly stroking the golden ringlets, "I am so glad that Herbert has found some one worthy of him; and *that*, you know, is

the highest compliment I can pay you; for in my fond eyes he is everything that is good and excellent; although," regarding him with a glance of gentle reprehension, "he *did* stay away from us so long, and never even wrote a line to tell us where we might find him."

Mr. Seymour's brow contracted, as it always did when she thus alluded to the past. He felt how unjust it was that Herbert should suffer for *his* misdeeds; and yet he dared not undeceive her, lest it should lead to the revival of painful ideas.

"I can safely promise you that I will not behave so again, my dear mother," replied our hero, with becoming regret; "and as, to use a very trite phrase, what is done cannot be undone, I must ask you to accord me a free pardon."

"Say no more," cried Mrs. Seymour, in high good humour; "*this* more than compensates for your former neglect—does it not, my dear?" appealing to her husband, who was too much agitated to attempt any reply.

"Then you approve of Ella?" smilingly observed Sir Edward, by way of concealing Mr. Seymour's embarrassment, which he could both understand and pity.

"Approve! I am *charmed* at the idea," replied the gentle lady, with unusual energy; "the first night I saw her I thought her the loveliest little fairy I had ever beheld, and when I began to know her, and to find out how amiable and good she is, admiration was deepened into love, and——"

"O Mrs. Seymour, you are far too indulgent," murmured Ella, trying to make her escape from the room.

"Indeed, you must not run away," whispered Mrs. Seymour, as she gazed lovingly into her blushing countenance; "I want to know when it was all settled—how long has it been on the *tapis?*"

"Only three years!" answered Lucy, who probably considered she had remained in the back-ground a sufficient time already.

"Three years!" ejaculated Mr. Seymour, with a peculiar glance at Lady Stanley; "you have indeed shown yourselves good friends," he added, in a voice of emotion.

"Why, then, were we kept in ignorance until to-night?" demanded Mrs. Seymour, looking puzzled.

"That was *my* doing, not Herbert's," Lady Stanley hastened to say. "He has repeatedly urged me to allow him to announce his engagement, but I preferred waiting until we should become mutually acquainted with each other, and have an opportunity of judging whether the marriage would be likely to prove all that we could wish. I was also anxious," she continued, with a look of maternal pride, for which no one blamed her, "to form my own conclusion as to whether my daughter would be likely to receive that consideration and respect from her husband's family which I deemed her due."

"Oh, there could be no question of that," said Mrs. Seymour, simply; "you must have known how dearly we should love and cherish her."

"Yes, I don't doubt you will do your very utmost to spoil her," chimed in Lucy, with one of her merry laughs; "but, glancing affectionately at Ella, "I shall be surprised if you succeed."

"I'll take care of that, my sage sister," replied Herbert, in a tone between jest and earnest.

"You!" with a significant arching of the eyebrows, and comical

expression of incredulity. "Well," after a pause, "I believe I would rather trust you with her than a certain Mr. Lexley, although the latter did condescend to transfer——"

"My dear Lucy," interposed her mother, in accents of mild reproof, "we must never trample upon the fallen."

"*Très bien, chère maman;* I won't, if,"—somewhat hesitatingly,—"if I can help it."

"And when is to be the happy day?" questioned Mrs. Seymour of her son.

"It was fixed for last week," he replied, looking entreatingly at Lady Stanley, who, in answer to his unexpressed desire, observed kindly,—

"I have no further objections to urge."

Herbert thanked her by a gesture, and leaning over Ella he pleaded,—

"What say you, my precious one?—shall it be to-morrow?"

"A very modest request, truly," exclaimed Lucy, who had caught the words. "I really think you might have the grace to allow us at least a few days in which to make our preparations."

But Herbert, turning a deaf ear to her objections, waited for Ella to speak.

"It is far too soon," she replied at length, without raising her eyes.

"The day after, then?" persisted Herbert.

Ella shook her head.

"You must have a little patience, Herbert," placidly remonstrated Mrs. Seymour; "there are hundreds of things to be attended to, before such an important event can be accomplished. Not only are the guests to be invited, the wedding breakfast to be ordered, the——"

"Oh, spare me the repetition of these unnecessary details," cried Herbert, in unfeigned dismay. "Lucy has made several attempts to inspire me with a proper respect for what she calls the "indispensable accompaniments of a wedding, but all in vain; and she has at last given me over as incorrigible."

"Why do you call them unnecessary?" demanded Mrs. Seymour, with a face of blank bewilderment; "we surely ought to study the appearance of things, and do our best, especially on such an occasion as this, to see that everything is conducted according to the prevailing *ton* of the *beau monde*."

"Would it greatly horrify you," said Herbert, smiling, "if we were to have a very quiet wedding, with scarcely any guests, and nothing in the way of ostentation or useless display?"

Mrs. Seymour stared at him for a minute in mute astonishment. Then she laughingly rejoined,—

"We must leave Lady Stanley to settle that question; *she* will know what ought, under such circumstances to be done, and what left undone."

"Had I consulted my own inclination, I might have preferred giving the affair a little more publicity," remarked her ladyship, in a thoughtful tone; "but Ella and Herbert are both so exceedingly anxious to avoid anything of the kind, that their wishes should, I think, be respected. What is your opinion?" turning inquiringly to Mr. Seymour.

"I quite agree with you," he answered, promptly; "they are the parties most concerned, and it is but fair that they should be conceded

the right of arranging all these minor points, according to their own fancy."

"Minor points!" repeated Mrs. Seymour, pleasantly shaking her head; "ah, my dear, I fear you are not a competent judge in such matters."

"Probably not," rejoined her husband, with a smile.

"However, of two evils we must, I suppose, choose the least," pursued Mr. Seymour, reflectively; "it would be far better to waive ceremony than to allow the marriage to be delayed."

"My proposal is this," said Sir Edward, with sudden energy; "let us adhere to our first plan, and go down to Penruthven, where every preparation has been made to receive us, and where the important ceremony can be performed as speedily and as quietly as could possibly be desired."

This proposition was, after a trifle more consideration, unanimously agreed to, and on the afternoon of the following day the whole party (including Colonel Lansmore and his wife, who had joined them for the express purpose of being present at the marriage) left Lanchester *en route* for Cornwall.

CHAPTER XC.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

"Led they not forth in rapture
A beauteous maiden there,
Resplendent as the morning sun,
Beaming with golden hair?"

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

"It's now the fortune of our friends,
In spite of tides and adverse winds,
To brave the storm they greatly feared,
And reached the port for which they steered."

"Behold! I see the haven nigh at hand,
To which I mean my wearie course to bend;
Vere the main shete, and bear up with the land,
The which afore is fayrly to be trend,
And seemeth safe from storms that may offend."

Faerie Queene.

"So He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

"From all my griefs, O Lord,
Thy mercy set me free;
Whilst in the confidence of prayer
My soul took hold on Thee."

ADDISON.

AT last the long-looked-for bridal day dawned in all its autumn brightness; and Herbert and Ella stood side by side within the quaint little church of Penruthven, and heard the words pronounced which, by uniting their destinies, secured to them the greatest joy and felicity this transitory world could possibly afford.

Immediately after the conclusion of the marriage ceremony the happy pair, instead of commencing the long continental tour they had been for some time contemplating, went to pass a few weeks among the Scottish mountains, Mr. and Mrs. Seymour meanwhile remaining at Penruthven, from whence the former could make frequent visits to Mertonsville, in order to note the progress of a staff of London upholsterers, who were actively engaged in every part of the mansion, altering, improving, and entirely refurnishing most of the principal suites of apartments, especially those which Mrs. Seymour had been accustomed to occupy, and which might, if left in their former condition, have served in some way or other to remind of scenes and occurrences which would be apt to exercise a very powerful and depressing effect over her mind, and react painfully and injuriously upon her—to a certain extent—shattered constitution.

One complete wing of the large building was fitted up, under Mr. Seymour's careful superintendence, in the most costly and luxurious manner. Nothing that wealth could purchase, or art devise, seemed wanting to unite perfection of comfort with the highest degree of refinement, both in the furnishings and embellishments of these

rooms, which he intended for Ella's special use—it having been arranged that she and Herbert should take up their residence at the Park.

This decision was received with intense delight by Mrs. Seymour, who greatly feared that the newly wedded pair would consider themselves bound to accept a handsome house which Sir Edward had lately built for them in the neighbourhood of Lanchester, though she was at a loss to understand—so she privately remarked to her husband—*why* the young baronet should consider it necessary to provide a residence for *their* son, when he must have been well aware that Herbert was quite able to do that himself.

"The only way of accounting for it," she added, after making several allusions to the subject, "is, that Lady Stanley being naturally desirous of keeping dear Ella as near herself as possible, thought she would in this way be likely to get her wish fulfilled."

And Mr. Seymour did not attempt to undeceive her; for having no more satisfactory reason to allege, he was well pleased that she should explain the matter in her own fashion.

* * * * * *

It was the 24th of December.

About three o'clock in the afternoon an express train from London stopped at the Dilton station.

Two passengers alighted—a lady and gentleman. The former, a graceful girlish figure, simply, yet richly attired in a travelling suit of brown velvet, trimmed with ermine; the latter, tall and distinguished-looking, with the noble bearing of mind and manhood impressed upon his lofty brow, and the brightness of a joy not altogether of earth, springing from the depths of his intellectual dark eyes.

Quietly, and without any outward manifestation of hurry or excitement, this gentleman assisted his companion to reach the platform, and then, placing her hand upon his arm, he gently drew her forward.

He had only advanced a step or two, and was stooping to make some low-toned observation to the beautiful creature at his side, when a sudden exclamation, instantaneously followed by a deafening cheer, burst upon their ear, and the next moment they were surrounded by a crowd of people, who, pressing forward with bare heads and smiling faces, respectfully bade them welcome.

"Don't be alarmed, my love," said the gentleman, in a reassuring whisper, as he felt the small hand tighten on his arm.

"O Herbert, what does it mean?" she breathlessly asked, almost bewildered by the number of faces, all gazing at herself and her husband with an expression of such hearty admiration, and deep, unfeigned interest.

"That will tell you, darling," replied Herbert, pointing smilingly to a triumphal arch which had been erected near the gateway leading into the road.

And Ella, timidly raising her eyes in the direction he pointed out, read, in large, unmistakable characters, the sentence—

"A THOUSAND WELCOMES TO THE YOUNG SQUIRE AND HIS LOVELY BRIDE."

This was scarcely calculated to lessen her confusion, but by making a great effort she succeeded in suppressing her emotion, and was even able to respond to the kindly greetings of their humble friends with her own sweet and peculiarly winning smile; when Herbert, who guessed how trying such an ordeal must be to one of her

shrinking and sensitive nature, said, in a low tone, expressive both of regret and tender solicitude,—

"I fancied that, by omitting to inform them at what hour we intended to arrive, we should escape anything in the way of an ovation; but as it is not so, we must make the best of it, or else these affectionate and warm-hearted creatures will be disappointed.

"My dear friends, I am delighted to see you all again," he continued, taking off his hat, and raising his voice, while he gazed around him with a face which glowed with kindly feeling.

The only answer he received was another loud cheer, which was caught up and echoed by a second group congregated outside.

Ere the sound died away, Herbert had reached a carriage which was waiting for them, and, after handing Ella into it, he paused with his own foot upon the step in doubt and astonishment.

"What are you going to do, my friends?"

"By your leave, sir, we intend to draw yourself and your lady home," quickly responded a man whom Herbert instantly recognised as being the same whom he had found lying one evening in a ditch some miles from the Park, ill and exhausted, apparently on the verge of starvation.

"Ah, Simon, is that you?" he cried, pleased at the discovery; "I'm glad indeed to behold you alive and well."

"Yes, thanks to your kindness, sir, I *am* alive," answered the man, with a jerk of his head, intended for a polite bow to Ella, "and mighty proud am I to see this day."

"You may well say that," exclaimed another of the bystanders, enthusiastically throwing his cap up in the air; "it's a glorious day for us all, sir," turning to Herbert with glistening eyes.

"Thank you, my friends. We shall not soon forget the warm reception you have given us," replied our, hero, showering kindly glances around him. "But I cannot allow you to take this step," he continued persuasively, on perceiving the preparations they were making to carry them home in triumph.

It was in vain, however, that he remonstrated; nothing could turn them from their purpose. The horses were taken out of the carriage, and the latter borne swiftly along, under waving banners, gay festoons, and flower-wreathed arches, which spanned the country road at equal distances from each other; where the plain and variegated holly, with its bright red berries; the lauristinus, with its clusters of half-opened blossoms; the sweet-scented hyacinth, the narcissus and chrysanthemum, the starlike anemone, and the delicate and fragrant Chinese rose, were all distinctly visible.

At one of the park gates the men halted, for the purpose of giving Lisburn's wife an opportunity of presenting the bride with some lovely tinted camellias, which the old man had himself so tastefully arranged in an elegant little basket filled with the greenest and softest moss, that Ella could not help uttering an exclamation of delighted surprise as she received them.

"Oh, thank you," she said, leaning forward and laying her small gloved hand upon the donor's shoulder, with a gesture of such unstudied grace and gentle kindness, that the good woman's eyes glistened gratefully.

"You're kindly welcome, ma'am," she replied, dropping a curtsey; "my husband says he only wishes they were better."

"That would be impossible," emphasised Ella, gazing fondly down upon them. "Look, Herbert!" holding up the basket (his attention having been claimed by some one addressing him, from the opposite window, he had not until then noticed what was going on), "are they not perfectly lovely?"

"Yes," he replied.

And the curious smile which stole to his lips, as his eye wandered from the camellias to herself, showed that, in his opinion, something else was quite as lovely.

"Tell your husband"—Lisburn was just then laid up with rheumatism, and unable to leave his bed—"that I shall very soon find my way down to him," said Herbert, after exchanging a word or two of kindness with the old woman, who then went back to her cottage, and delivered his message to her afflicted spouse, together with her own unanswerable conclusions as to the beauty and goodness of Herbert's fair young bride.

On reaching the house, Ella met with an agreeable surprise; for scarcely had Herbert time to hand her from the carriage, when she found herself clasped in Lady Stanley's arms.

"O mamma, this is indeed an unexpected pleasure," she exclaimed; "now I shall have courage."

And, with sparkling eyes and a heightened colour, she hastened to respond to the scarcely less affectionate embrace of her mother-in-law, who was in an ecstasy of delight.

Next came Mr. Seymour, and it was on his arm that Ella passed through the tesselated hall, with its gilded ceiling and painted walls; its sparkling crystal gaseliers and pillars of Italian marble; its old Florentine bronzes, rare statues and classical groups, exquisitely inlaid tables of ebony and buhl, on which were disposed, in "most admired disorder" beautiful enamels on porcelain, plaques of ivory, carved with Scripture subjects, curious mosaics, and delicate china.

Her conductor seemed intuitively to divine the young bride's feelings as she thus stood for the first time within the dwelling which was to be her future home, for he merely pointed to the illuminated device brilliantly shining over the doorway in honour of their arrival; and, without any unnecessary parade or delay, led her past the assembled servants, and into the nearest reception room, where Sir Edward and Lucy Stanley were both anxiously expecting them.

"It was all Mrs. Seymour's doing," said Lucy, when Ella had again expressed her surprise and pleasure at this unlooked-for reunion with her own family. "She persuaded mamma to come, as she fancied it would seem more homelike if we were here to welcome you."

"Yes," interposed Mrs. Seymour, with a gratified smile; "and you do not know how many obstacles I had to overcome before I could get Lady Stanley to accede to my wishes: I assure you, Ella, it was no easy matter."

"How kind of you to take so much trouble!" warmly responded her daughter-in-law, with a glance of affection.

"But you must come upstairs, dear child, and let me show you your rooms," continued Mrs. Seymour, taking her by the hand, and drawing her towards the door. "I can plainly see," she added, looking back, "that Lucy is longing to have you all to herself."

"O Mrs. Seymour," laughed the gay-hearted girl, "I hope I am not quite so selfish."

"I am sure it is quite natural, my dear. Nevertheless, I can allow no one but myself the privilege of doing the honours on this auspicious occasion."

In less than an hour the happy party sat down to a quiet family dinner.

Ella strongly objected to take possession of the seat assigned to herself at the head of the table, and it was only after Mrs. Seymour had touchingly alluded to her own delicate state of health, and represented the relief she should experience if Ella would from henceforth consent to perform those duties and obligations which devolve upon every hostess, that the latter at length permitted herself to be inducted into her new dignities.

"The least we can do in return for your goodness and generosity in relinquishing your own plans to please us," said Mr. Seymour, addressing his son in a tone of deep feeling, "is to endeavour, by every means in our power, to render you both as free and independent as you would have been had you carried out your first intentions; and it will, I assure you, afford us the warmest pleasure to see you installed as master and mistress of the ceremonies, and——"

"*Mistress*, Ella may, and ought to be, since my mother wishes it," rejoined Herbert, laying his hand caressingly upon his young wife's shoulder (as if to arm her with courage and confidence), and then deliberately seating himself between his mother and Lady Stanley; "but Mertonsville will have no other master while you, my dear father, are spared."

"Consistent to the end!" murmured the other, bestowing on him a glance of the tenderest affection. "Daily and hourly do I feel how utterly unworthy I am of such a son."

"Really, Mr. Seymour, you are beginning to entertain a very extraordinary opinion of yourself," remonstrated his wife. "Several times lately I have heard you speak like that."

"Have you?" he replied, a sudden flush passing across his brow.

He seemed about to add more, but the entrance of the butler and other servants prevented him from pursuing the subject.

Late into the night the sound of gladness was heard in the peaceful little hamlet of Mertonsville; old and young seemed to swell the general tide of rejoicing, while the merry peal of bells rang out upon the frosty air, and bright bonfires were glowing red upon the distant heights, sending up their ruddy blaze against the star-lit sky.

Just as the Seymours were preparing for rest, noiseless footsteps approached the windows, and a band of singers, consisting of the members of the Dilton Church choir, commenced a Christmas carol.

One sweet song followed another in rapid succession; then came an effective recitative, composed for the occasion by one of their number, and sung in parts, and as a *finale* the whole choir joined in chanting the old Church psalm—

> "While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
> All seated on the ground," etc.

After which every sound was hushed, and silence and profound repose settled down upon the lordly dwelling.

Not that all of its inmates slept.

No.

Mr. Seymour, for one, passed the live-long night in self-examination and prayer; but, as the first glimmering of dawn entered his chamber, he felt that in like manner the dawning of a new existence had begun in his soul.

Herbert also remained for many hours awake. The feelings which had been all the day rushing with torrent-like force through his mind were yet not sufficiently brought under control to enable him to calm himself to slumber.

His joy was so intense, as he contrasted that other home-coming and its serious consequences with the present (so like in some respects, and withal so utterly dissimilar), that he could not help retracing step by step the way the Lord had led him, and confessing with thankful and adoring gratitude that, notwithstanding its varied dangers and difficulties, its temptations and disappointments, its heart-breaking afflictions and most painful vicissitudes, it had been, from first to last—yes, he could see and realize it all now—the *right* way, every step of which was invisibly and mysteriously conducting him onward to his present felicity.

And Ella.

Her dreams were surely pleasant ones; for she slept as calmly and peacefully as an infant, with the flush of happiness illumining her soft cheeks, her lips parted in a half-smile, and her pure white brow unshadowed by a single cloud.

Dearly as he loved her, Herbert had always shrunk from making any allusion to the treatment he had received from his father before being formally dismissed from the Park; he knew how much it would distress her to hear it, and furthermore he could not bring himself to enter into particulars which must have the effect of considerably lowering Mr. Seymour in her eyes. Herbert's sentiments, therefore, even if he had explained them, would scarcely have been intelligible to Ella; for though, with the quick instinct of affection, she had comprehended and sympathised with much that her beloved husband had that day experienced, there was still scenes flitting ever and anon before *his* mental vision which *she* had no power of perceiving, and which he would never pain her by revealing, albeit, on some future occasion, she may learn much from Mr. Seymour's lips concerning his own and his son's past history.

CHAPTER XCI.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGE, AND DEATHS.

"Sin' ye maun gae to leave us, we maun bid ye a' adieu!
The fond farewell reluctant flows, as ye recede frae view
We maun leave ye to yersel's again, where'er ye wish to go;
Nae langer we can follow, to share your joy or woe."

"A woman wails for justice at the gate."

"Alas! what's now his fate? Sure evil has
O'erta'en him on his way. The steed returned.
Hark! at the stable door he neighs alone.
It augurs nothing good." ANON.

CHRISTMAS morning was ushered in at the Park amid bright smiles and cheerful expectant faces, while kindly greetings and loving embraces were exchanged on all sides.

Every one seemed in the best of spirits. Mrs. Seymour declared that she had at length attained to the highest summit of her desires; and her husband, though he made no allusion to his own new-found peace and tranquillity, showed by the expression of his countenance, irradiated as it was by the lustre of a heavenly brightness, that he also had nothing left to wish for.

After prayers, which were, at Mr. Seymour's request, conducted by Herbert, came breakfast. Long before it was concluded, the old butler approached Sir Edward, and said a few words to him in an undertone; whereupon the latter rose from his seat, and, pleading an engagement, begged Mrs. Seymour to excuse him, and without waiting for a response quietly left the room.

Mr. Seymour followed him; but, returning the next moment, he resumed his former place at the table, and again joined in the conversation as if nothing had happened.

"Now, how shall we spend the day?" asked Mrs. Seymour, half an hour later. "Ella, my darling," throwing her arm fondly around her, "what would *you* like to do?"

The young wife's eyes unconsciously sought her husband's as she answered with a smile and a blush, "I am ready for anything."

"You dear good little creature," returned Mrs. Seymour, kissing her; "I never thought I should love any one half so well as I do you. By giving me such a daughter, Herbert has amply atoned for his past remissness. But I must not speak of that," said she, suddenly interrupting herself, as she caught sight of the peculiar expression which came to Mr. Seymour's face. "I observe that whenever I touch upon this subject you all begin to put on your gravest looks."

"They don't like to hear you scold me, mother mine," said Herbert, lightly.

"I scold you!" exclaimed the gentle lady, quite aghast at the idea, "nothing was farther from my intentions."

"I dare say Mrs. Seymour's object in reminding you from time to

time of your undutifulness," remarked the mischievous Lucy, "is simply to prevent you from repeating it on any future occasion."

"There's no fear of my ever doing that," returned Herbert, quickly, "unless," laying his hand playfully upon Ella's shoulder, "it should be at my wife's particular desire."

"You would not ask him to leave me, my child?" questioned Mrs. Seymour, gazing wistfully into the soft violet eyes which were lifted so lovingly to her own.

"No, no," with a half shake of the pretty head at Herbert; "he is only joking—besides," in a confidential tone, "if *he* went, *I* would stay."

"Bravo, Ella!" cried Lucy, gleefully rubbing her hands together; "I'm glad you have *some* spirit."

"Allow me to remind you that Mrs. Seymour's first question still remains unanswered," remarked Lady Stanley, after she had exchanged a significant glance with Mr. Seymour. "Unless we get ready at once," she added, dropping her voice, so that he only could understand what she said, "we shall be late."

"Ah!" replied Mr. Seymour, slightly starting as he glanced at his watch. "I was about to propose," he went on hurriedly, "that you should all accompany me to church. Have you any objection, my dear?" turning complaisantly to his daughter-in-law.

"I!" she answered, with a little flush of pleasure; "oh, no! I shall be delighted."

Mr. Seymour smiled.

"Then I will go at once and order the carriages," he said, moving towards the door.

"And in the meantime we had better commence our own preparations," observed Lady Stanley, in a voice of decision, "otherwise we shall scarcely be in time."

Accordingly, the four ladies betook themselves to their respective apartments; and when shortly afterwards the carriages were announced, they were all ready to take their seats.

As the first, containing Mrs. Seymour, Lady Stanley, and Lucy, rolled away, Herbert glanced around him in some surprise.

"It is very strange what has become of Edward," he said, following his father and Ella into the second carriage; "I can't see anything of him."

"We shall probably meet him at the church," was Mr. Seymour's brief reply, as he signed to one of the servants to close the carriage door, and then, leaning, forward told him where they wished to be set down.

"The footman must have mistaken your order," exclaimed Herbert, as, after passing through the long avenue, they turned off to the left. "This is not the road to Dilton."

"Are there no other churches except at Dilton?" asked Mr. Seymour, a curious smile lighting up his face.

"Certainly not in this direction," replied Herbert, confidently.

"Not even a quondam barn?" suggested his father, in tones which were tremulous with hitherto suppressed emotion.

Quickly recovering himself, however, he drew Ella's attention to the gaily decorated hamlet, at the entrance of which they had now come.

"Yes, it is very pretty," she said, her soft cheeks becoming suffused

with the deepest carnation, as she saw her own name in all directions, coupled with that of Herbert.

"My dear father, what is the meaning of this?" said the latter, grasping Mr. Seymour's hand, as at that very moment a peal of bells rang out their heartsome welcome; while groups of men and women and children approached them, and tried in their own way to exhibit some mark of respect and affection towards one whom they had for nearly three years mourned as dead. "Why do they all look as if they were expecting us? These bells—where do they come from?"

Any reply was unnecessary; for the carriage just then stopped in front of a large and handsome church, which had been erected upon the same site formerly occupied by the old barn.

Herbert rubbed his eyes in complete bewilderment, as he gazed upon the lofty edifice, and it was only when Mr. Seymour—himself excessively agitated—drew him aside, and after hurriedly whispering a few words in his ear, directed his attention to the brief device that had been carved in stone relievo over the porch—*in memoriam*—that the truth began to dawn upon his mind.

"I have allowed the inscription to remain," added Mr. Seymour, with emotion, "because it is still applicable in more ways than one."

"My dear father," exclaimed Herbert, in a husky voice, "I shall never forget this."

It was all he could say, but his glowing countenance and glistening eyes were of themselves sufficiently eloquent without words.

"Now I have another surprise for you," continued Mr. Seymour, as they entered the building, and opening a door just within the handsome portico, he ushered the whole party into the vestry.

There they found the missing baronet sitting side by side with a clerical-looking personage, whose back was towards them.

"James! is it possible?" cried Herbert, after attentively scanning him for the space of half a minute.

"My dear Mr. Herbert!"

And the other sprang from his chair, and, seizing our hero's outstretched hand, wrung it with warmest affection and delight.

Then he turned to Ella; and, bowing respectfully, began to offer his congratulations.

She thanked him by a look; and coming forward with an air of winning frankness, gave him her own hand so kindly and cordially, and addressed him with such marked consideration and affability, that it was quite evident she too had learnt to regard him in the light of a tried and much-esteemed friend.

"Are you going to preach, James?" inquired Herbert, in a tone of lively interest, as the bells suddenly ceased.

"So it appears," he answered, glancing at Mr. Seymour with a little deprecating shrug; "through I cannot help repeating that it would be far better if some other arrangement were made."

"Now, no remonstrances, Gordon," interposed Sir Edward, with a reminding touch upon his arm. "It would be most unreasonable for us to ask Herbert to officiate on such an occasion as this."

"Besides, you must bear in mind that I am not, like you, a regularly ordained minister, James," added Herbert; "and——"

"Oh, that is nothing;" said Gordon, eagerly, "for Mr. Seymour assured me that his intentions respecting this church——"

Here Mr. Seymour interrupted him by beckoning him to the other end of the room, where they conversed together for a short time in too low a tone for their companions to hear, though the occasional glances directed towards Mrs. Seymour showed that the consultation which was going on bore some special reference to her.

"Well, sir, you shall be obeyed," said James Gordon, as they rejoined the others.

"A thousand thanks," returned Mr. Seymour, looking greatly relieved.

"It is all settled, Herbert," addressing his son, with a smile; "your friend Gordon is going to preach, and Sir Edward has promised to preside at the organ."

Thus saying, he gave his arm to Ella and led the way through the now well-filled church to their own pew, which was situated close to the pulpit.

Herbert's feelings may be conceived, but not described, when he thus found himself once more surrounded by the old familiar faces who had been wont to assemble with him for a like purpose in days gone by.

He gazed around him, *not* to admire the architectural beauty of the edifice, with its arched galleries, richly ornamented seats, and stained-glass windows, through which the wintry sun was struggling, but to remember the last time he had worshipped God in that very spot, when in broken language and with tear-dimmed eyes he had bade his humble friends a long and sad farewell, scarcely daring to hope that they would ever meet again on this side eternity.

And now they *had* met—and met in joyfulness. The sorrows of the past were forgotten, or, if remembered, only to add to the universal jubilation. Truly, thought Herbert, "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

A few prelusive notes from the organ recalled him from these reflections; and it was with a thankful heart that he joined in the beautiful song that followed—a song in which old and young, rich and poor, lent their united voices, and seemed thereby to raise their whole soul in grateful love to the great Father of spirits,—

"We praise Thee, O God: we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord."

Softly Sir Edward played when he came to the words, "O Lord, in Thee have I trusted; let me never be confounded;" and softly was the refrain taken up and echoed by the congregation (many of whom had evidently practised well this part of the service)—*let me never, never be confounded.*

Mr. Seymour's head was bowed, the better to hide the happy tears which he could not restrain, when James Gordon stood up and announced his text—"*This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*"

Not that any allusion was made to what had occurred (on Mrs. Seymour's account this would have been very undesirable); nevertheless, many a touching reminiscence flashed across the memories of those who were acquainted with the particulars of Herbert's providential escape from the melancholy fate which befell nearly all the other passengers on board the hapless *Burdwan*; and all in that memorial church felt less or more the peculiar suitability of the words thus selected as the subject of James Gordon's discourse.

The sermon itself needs no description. It was just what might be expected from Gordon, one of whose chief characteristics consisted in his thorough earnestness, and the eagerness with which he endeavoured, *not* to fascinate the ear or charm the understanding, but to convince the heart.

Often, therefore, where the tongue of the learned would have been utterly unavailing to arose the slumbering soul to a consciousness of its danger, and the graceful eloquence of such as were merely gifted with human attainments only *pleased*, without *edifying*, James Gordon's plain, albeit conclusive language, simple, yet pungent, and sometimes unpalatable reflections, had the desired effect.

"He is an excellent preacher,"—this was Mrs. Seymour's decided opinion when asked by Lady Stanley how she liked the sermon;—"but," lowering her voice to a confidential whisper, "I was greatly afraid that poor Herbert would think him rather personal in his remarks."

"How so?" asked Lady Stanley, feeling somewhat curious to find out what was passing in her friend's mind.

"Why, the text alone was enough to disconcert him," she continued, in the aforesaid low tone; "for, though exceedingly appropriate, it was anything but flattering to Herbert; and as for the sermon, the picture this Mr. Gordon drew of the prodigal, wandering in foreign lands, without letting his friends know where he was or what he was doing, must have fallen like a premeditated reproach upon the poor boy's ear, so precisely do they resemble each other in their wandering propensities, though in every other respect I am happy to say they are vastly different."

"Different, indeed!" responded Lady Stanley, who could hardly maintain her seriousness at this strange way of viewing the subject. "I should never have dreamt of instituting a comparison between them."

"Nor I," exclaimed her friend, "if Mr. Gordon had not put it into my head. When I have an opportunity," she added thoughtfully, "I will ask Mr. Seymour whether it did not occur to him in the same light. Meantime, I wonder whether Ella"—looking around in search of her daughter-in-law—"noticed the allusion."

"Hush! do not mention it to her," said Lady Stanley, hurriedly. "She is so proud of her husband, you know, that it would distress her beyond measure, were she to hear him spoken of in any terms save those of the deepest respect."

"Yes, yes, you are right," replied Mrs. Seymour, in a changed voice; "dear child! I would not vex her for the world. Perhaps, after all, it may be only my morbid fancy which makes me imagine that Mr. Gordon meant to be personal, because, however long Herbert may have stayed away, *he* certainly had no right to blame him."

"Of course not," assented Lady Stanley; "and from my own knowledge of Mr. Gordon's character I am quite sure that he would be the very last man to take such a step, especially as he has the highest opinion of Herbert, as you may have inferred from the unfeigned pleasure he manifested when the two met in the vestry."

"Ah, yes! now I think of it they *did* seem very affectionate," remarked Mrs. Seymour, complacently.

And from the various questions she then proceeded to ask regarding James Gordon, and the manner Herbert became acquainted with him, she clearly proved that she had not the most remote idea that

he was in any way related to the old woman in whom she had formerly been so much interested.

I must not prolong this history, which has already exceeded every reasonable limit, by entering into a detailed explanation of the profuse preparations which had been made for the munificent regalement of Mr. Seymour's tenantry on this festive occasion.

Suffice it to say that they were entertained right nobly—the squire himself presiding at one of the beautifully decorated tables, Herbert at a second, Sir Edward Stanley at a third, while James Gordon occupied the post of honour at a fourth.

It was literally a day of rejoicing for all; and when, after the sumptuous meal had been concluded, after speeches had been made, and good wishes exchanged, and the band of music which was in attendance had played several overtures and other effective pieces, and Mr. Seymour rose to return with Herbert and his friends to the Park, leaving his grateful tenants to the unrestrained enjoyment of the entertainments and amusements which had been liberally provided for them—including an itinerant menagerie and other interesting and instructive exhibitions—the whole assemblage sprang, *en masse*, from their seats, and cheered them as they departed.

The following morning Mr. Seymour requested Herbert's presence in the library, for the purpose of witnessing a signature he was about to affix to some unimportant law paper.

The young man obeyed, and not until the pen was put into his hand, and he found himself called upon to add his own name to those already there, did it occur to him to ask the nature of the document they were required to sign.

Mr. Seymour smiled, but returned no answer to his question, seeing which Herbert forbore to repeat it.

No sooner, however, had he done what was expected of him than the congratulatory tone of Mr. Malcolm's voice, as he turned towards him, and began in his fulsome manner to make a few complimentary observations, aroused his suspicions; and, casting a hasty glance over the paper, he discovered to his surprise and vexation that his father had formally made over the whole of his property to him, from that day forward.

"Nay, do not refuse," said Mr. Seymour, seeing from the expression of Herbert's face that he was by no means satisfied with the proposal; "it is the least I can do, my dear boy, after unjustly depriving you of everything during all these years, and by accepting this you will show that you have really forgiven——"

"Father," said Herbert, laying his hand impressively upon Mr. Seymour's arm, and gazing earnestly into his face, "so long as this document exists I shall be miserable."

"But why, my son?" said the squire, persuasively.

"Every day, every hour, I should be reproaching myself. Every time I looked at you or my mother a pang would reach my heart, and —in short, I *cannot* agree to such an unfair proceeding. No, no, dear father, let us return to the old *regime* again, and when you hear me complain,"—this was added with an affectionate smile and a pressure of the hand which Mr. Seymour found irresistible—"it will be time enough to alter our arrangements." And possessing himself of the offending document, he unceremoniously thrust it into the fire.

"Now I can breathe more freely," said he, when it was consumed.

Mr. Seymour could not speak. He remembered with sudden distinctness the last occasion on which those three had met in that library, when he had himself destroyed a somewhat similar instrument, and uttered the words which were designed to lead to a dissolution of that bond which ever ought to exist between the members of one family.

"There are, I apprehend, few gentlemen of your age who would act thus," blandly insinuated Mr. Malcolm, who, however, if the truth must be confessed, was at that very moment mentally apostrophising Herbert as one of the greatest fools he had ever met with. "I don't know how to express my admiration of your son's noble conduct," turning deferentially to Mr. Seymour.

Herbert looked at him with a half-smile, apparently intending to speak; but altering his mind, he closed his lips again, and merely bowed.

"It *is* noble conduct," exclaimed Mr. Seymour, addressing Mr. Malcolm with more cordiality than he usually employed towards him; "but if you knew my son better, you would cease to feel surprised at anything he does, so superior is he to the rest of the world. The fact is," he continued, somewhat hesitatingly, but with a gesture of dignified humility which well became him, "*he* is far advanced in a lesson which I have only just begun to learn, and has given abundant and conclusive evidence of the reality and sincerity of his principles by choosing, like Moses, rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

From henceforth all was peace and harmony at the Park. Mrs. Seymour lived for about eleven years after Herbert's marriage, and had the pleasure of seeing herself surrounded by little childish forms, who loved to clamber into her lap, and throw soft, dimpled hands around her neck, and cover her pale face with warm kisses, and lisp out in their pretty, winning, infantile tones the time-honoured name of "grand-mamma."

She never wholly recovered her recollective powers; but as fresh incidents began to arise, and new claimants to her affection made their welcome appearance, the *past* seemed swallowed up in the all-engrossing *present*, and she gradually left off alluding even in the most distant manner to what had formerly occurred.

Our good friend Willson lived long enough to take Herbert's first-born son into her arms, and press her aged lips upon its unconscious baby brow; and then the dear old woman died. She literally fell asleep in Jesus, for without a pang or a groan, a struggle or a sigh, her gentle spirit returned to Him who gave it. She peacefully closed her eyes upon the things of time, and opened them in eternity.

A plain slab of white marble may still be seen within the Dilton Church, bearing the following inscription:

SACRED TO THE MEMORY
OF
MARY WILLSON,
Aged 80.

"*Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.*

"*Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*"

James Gordon gave up his charge at Lanchester, and came to Mertonsville, where Herbert had, at Mr. Seymour's suggestion, prepared a handsome house for his reception upon the identical spot that his mother's cottage originally occupied. This house, together with a considerable portion of the adjacent land, was pressed upon his acceptance so earnestly, and with such delicate consideration, that he could not refuse the offered gift, especially as he had always cherished a strong, though unacknowledged, wish to return to the scenes of his boyhood, and end his days where he had first commenced them.

He and Herbert, therefore, were not separated, but still continued to work side by side—*Gordon* being, of course, the recognised minister of the Memorial Church.

One word about Edmund Hastings.

After his brother's departure for St. Petersburg he still persevered in his attentions to Miss Rosalie Granville; but for the sake of appearances the young lady's mother would not allow the marriage to take place until a sufficient time had elapsed to enable the invidious world to forget the mercenary spirit she had shown in so summarily breaking off the engagement which previously existed between her daughter and Charles Hastings.

Time passed on, however, and the wedding-day was at length fixed.

Poor Sir George, who, ever since the banishment of his favourite son, had been growing more and more helpless and hopeless—witnessed its approach without venturing a word of remonstance; though being aware of the heartless manner in which Rosalie had conducted herself towards Charles, he could not look forward to the contemplated union with any other sentiment save that of dissatisfaction and regret.

The evening before the marriage arrived, and he was sitting alone, disconsolately ruminating upon his past and present grievances, and bitterly lamenting the fate which had assigned him such a reckless and unprincipled son, when he was aroused from his reflections by the entrance of a servant, who came to inform him that a lady desired earnestly to see him.

"I cannot be disturbed," he replied, briefly.

But to his surprise the man stood still, like one who considers what he shall do next.

Presently he advanced close to his master's chair, and fixing on him a peculiar look, said hurriedly,—

"I told her you were engaged, sir, but she seemed determined to see you. She says——" here he paused, and gazed irresolutely down upon the carpet, then lifting his eyes, but not his voice, he continued, "she says she is Mr. Edmund's wife."

"What!" exclaimed Sir George, starting as if he had been shot. "Some impostor, I suppose, Benson?" he added, inquiringly, and with a deep red flush upon his cheek.

The servant shook his head. He was an old man, and had served Sir George since he was a boy.

"I should not be surprised if it were to turn out true, sir; you know you have never yet discovered how Mr. Edmund managed to get supplied with money during the years we thought him dead."

"True," said Sir George, sighing heavily; "but with all his depravity he would surely never be base enough to marry a rich wife, and desert her after he had spent her fortune."

Benson made no answer, but the severe pressure of his lips seemed to indicate an opposite opinion.

An instant's silence succeeded, and then Sir George, with another of his long, deep-drawn sighs, requested that the stranger might be admitted.

And Benson, after regarding him with an expression of the keenest anxiety and most respectful sympathy, went to fulfil his command.

I need not repeat all that passed during the interview.

Sir George was soon convinced of the truth of the unfortunate lady's story.

Edmund had met with her abroad, married her, and lived with her and her father—a wealthy West Indian planter—until he seemed suddenly to discover that some urgent business required his immediate attention in England.

His wife being unable to leave her father, who was old and infirm, Edmund promised to return to her directly he had adjusted his affairs; but instead of acting up to his engagement, he made, first one excuse and then another for remaining in England. Latterly, he had altogether ceased to write to her; and, to add to her grief and perplexity, it was found that he had taken advantage of the blind confidence his father-in-law had reposed in him to make away with his property to such an extent that the old man was almost ruined, and died in the greatest distress.

Being thus left alone, Mrs. Hastings determined on seeking her faithless husband, for whom, notwithstanding the treatment she had received at his hands, she still entertained a wife's affection.

This was her simple story, told with many tears, and many touching additions and heart-rending details.

She had scarcely finished her recital when Edmund himself burst, in his noisy, unceremonious fashion, into the room; and after throwing a riding-whip which he carried in his hand upon the table, he flung himself down, booted and spurred, and covered with mud as he was, upon his father's beautiful satin-covered sofa.

Till then he had not recognised the lady, who was looking another way; but as she turned and confronted him, he sprang up with a white, quivering face, clenched his hands in impotent fury, and with a feeling of rage in his heart, and a muttered imprecation upon his lips, he again seized his whip, and before a word could be spoken he had darted from the apartment.

About midnight his horse returned home snorting, bespattered, and—riderless; and early the next morning Edmund was found lying quite dead upon the stony road. As his collar-bone and neck were fractured, it was conjectured that the spirited animal he rode, getting impatient at his violent use of the spur and curb, reared up, and fell back, crushing him in the fall.

Once more we are in Lanchester.

The long string of carriages standing at Sir Edward's door, the white favours and bouquets, the gaily decorated house, magnificently spread collation, and airily dressed ladies, seem suggestive of a grand wedding; and if we accompany the distinguished party to the church, we shall find that our suspicions are correct; and besides

recognising many of our old friends among the company, discover that the bride and bridegroom are not altogether unknown to us.

In common parlance, Lucy Stanley, after refusing innumerable offers, and declaring again and again that she would never marry, was at length prevailed upon, to the great delight of Herbert and her sister, to bestow her hand upon Charles Hastings, who, so far as her affectionate friends could decide, was in every way worthy of her, and bade fair to render her married life as happy as they or herself could possible desire.

And now my story is told.

After the storm cometh a calm.

"Perfect through sufferings" is the royal law.

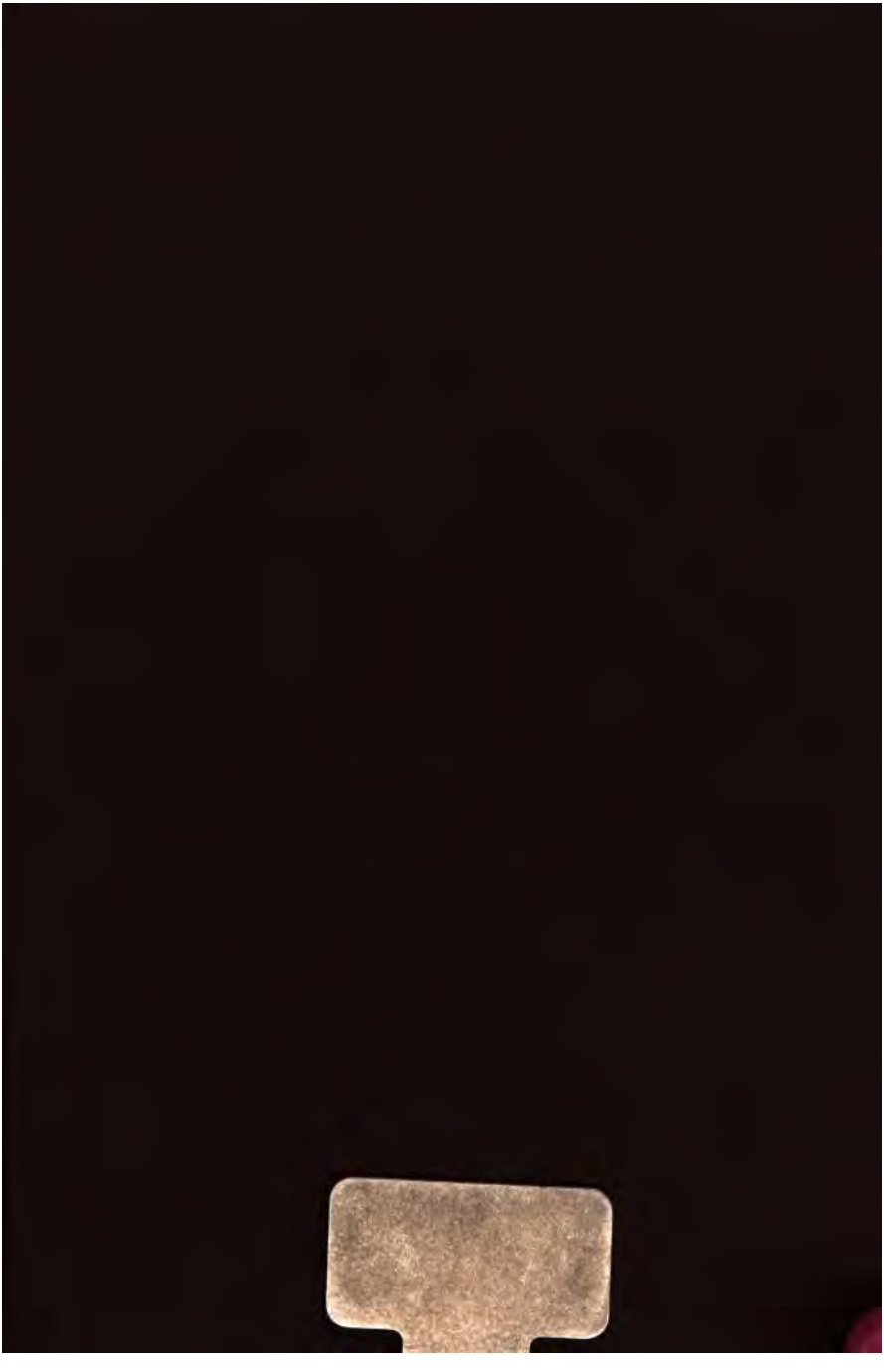
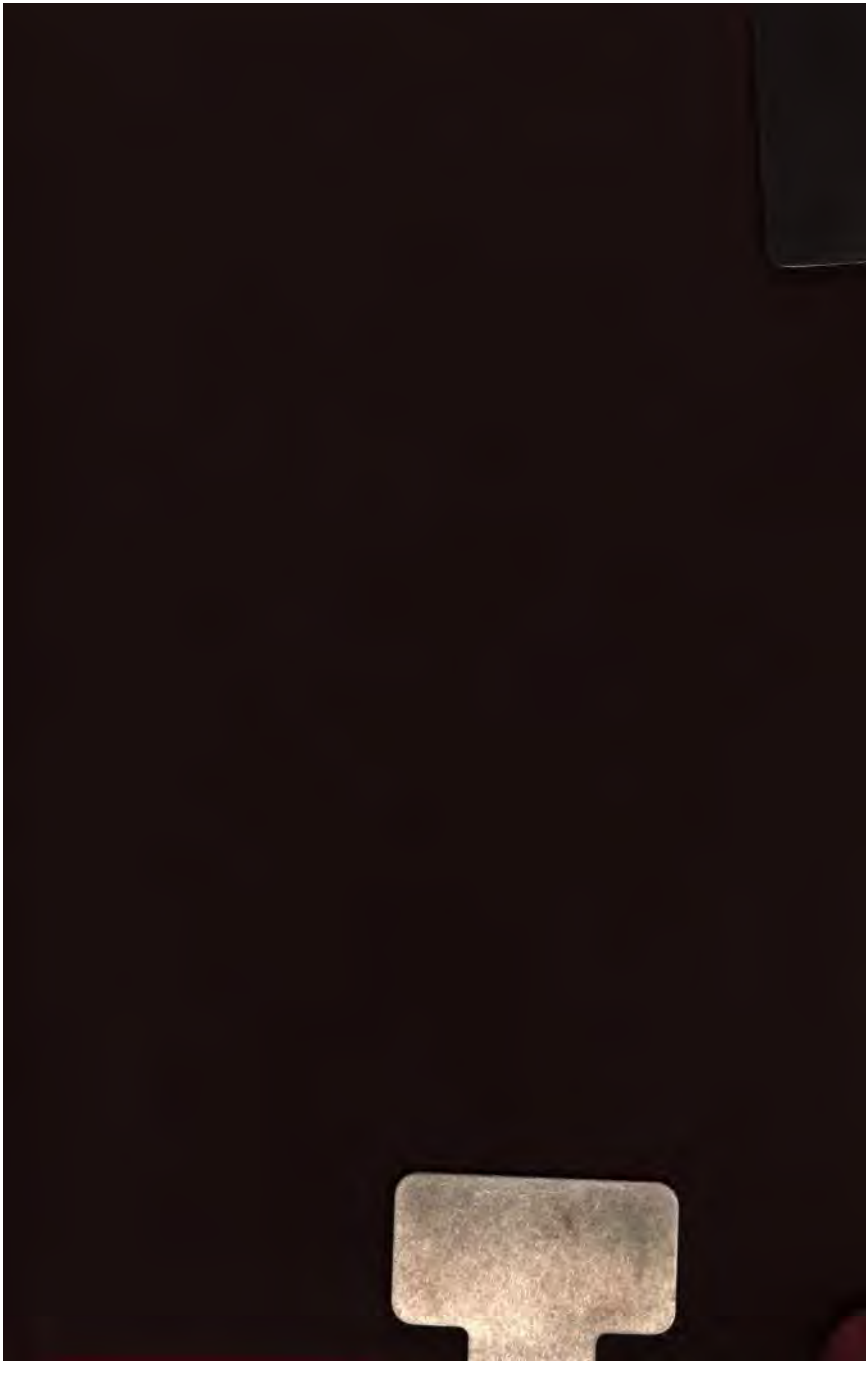
Herbert had sometimes found it hard—

"To make the spirit master of the flesh, and God of both."

Hard to take up his cross *cheerfully*, and follow Christ through evil report; to swim against the tide, and forego ease and pleasure, and earthly distinctions, rather than make a truce with vanity; nevertheless he succeeded, as all those must and will do, who like him, resolve to know nothing among men, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.

READER, *There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,*

Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

THE END.

Watson & Hazell, Printers, London and Aylesbury.